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THE

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE

A Play

43495

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"EUGENE ARAM," "THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII,"

"RIENZI," &c.

"Né pour les passions et pour le repentir."

VOLTAIRE, *Irene*, *Act* 5, *Sc.* IX.

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DEDICATED

TO

W. C. MACREADY, ESQ.

FOR SCIENCE AND GENIUS

UNSURPASSED IN HIS PROFESSION,

AND

FROM WHOM THE ARTISTS,

OF WHAT PROFESSION SOEVER,

MAY LEARN THAT

ART IS THE POETRY OF NATURE,

EXPRESSING

THE TRUE

THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF

THE IDEAL.

Albany, October, 1836

PREFACE.

It seems among the caprices of literature, that one whose life has excited an interest so unfading and universal, and whose destinies—even more than the splendors of his reign, the solemn graces of his court, or the stately muses of Racine—invest with no unreal poetry the memory of Louis the Fourteenth, —that one whose very fate was a poem, whose very struggles were a drama, should have furnished so little inspiration to the poet, and escaped altogether the resuscitation of the stage. If it be true (as I hold it indisputable) that the great material of dramatic representation lies not so much in the analysis of

one, as in the delineation of adverse and opposing, passions, perhaps few subjects can be found more adapted to the skill of the dramatic poet than the love and the repentance, the fall and the atonement, of Madame de La Vallière. The strongest contrast of motives, the most tragic struggle of impulse and of principle, in the breast of a woman, is ever that which is created by the conflict of the Affections and the Conscience: Nor does the spectacle fail of a great and an impressive moral, if, after all the concessions and most of the triumphs of the first, the last becomes eventually the victor.

The mind of Madame de La Vallière was not of the highest order. With her the reasoning faculty was seated in the heart; but her very weakness, united and embellished as it was with so much genuine tenderness of sentiment and honest depth of emotion, ought to render her character yet more affecting on the stage. For pathos is rarely derived from the sternness of qualities purely intellectual; and we are led, by our sympathies with the infirmities of our nature, to conclusions that purify and exalt it. The philosophy of the drama is the metaphysics of the passions.

But if the character of Madame de La Vallière be dramatic, it is a task, I allow, of considerable difficulty, to concentrate the events of her life into the limits of a drama. The Probabilities require us to extend the period of action over the eight years of her historical career; that sad, not sudden, but unceasing, progress from innocence to splendour—from the idolized to the deserted—from the deserted to the penitent and devout. In the interval between the second and third act more especially, the reader will tacitly supply the lapse of time that may seem to him required by such harmonies as Fiction, insensibly, as it were, establishes with Fact.

The time is past for discussing the propriety of the Unities, which even the dazzling example of the Author of Sardanapalus could not prove to be other than the sacrifice of Nature, from a misguided superstition for the Natural. The unity of character—the only one, indeed, on which Aristotle very peremptorily insists—is also the only one which all time and all criticism must recognise as essential and indispensable. When the Stagirite condemns Euripides for violating the unity of his character of Iphigenia, by ascribing to

her, in one sentence, sentiments wholly inapposite to, and irreconcileable with, the character which preceding sentences had portrayed, that great philosopher proved by the most illustrious example, what common sense might suffice to teach us—viz., that no poetry of expression can atone for that anomaly in poetical creation by which the creatures are made inconsistent with themselves. It may, however, be noticeable, that when fidelity to truth compels us to waive the minor unity of *time*, nicer and more delicate refinements of art are sometimes afforded us in our treatment of the unity of *character*. Maintaining the paramount qualities that individualize our creation, we are enabled subtilely, and (to the uninvestigating) almost insensibly, to shew how we have served ourselves of the lapse of time, to modify them or develop. Macbeth in the fifth act is not the Macbeth of the first. But the bold, the ruthless, never the *hardened* tyrant, is precisely that which years and events would necessarily ripen, from the brave, but vacillating, the tender but ambitious thane, who requires omen and prediction, the urgings of hell, and the familiar inspirations of a feller and more powerful

mind, to shape the thought into the action, the "Dare not," to "I will."

In the Play now submitted to the reader, the supposed interval of time between the second and third act produces, though not perhaps very markedly, its effect on the character of Louis. It brings (as that interval of time did in life) into more visible display his infirmer and vainer qualities, his gorgeous and sovereign selfishness, his morbid craving for amusement, (the mental vision aching beneath the glare of his own pomp,) the properties of a temperament restless, eager, susceptible, yet cold, with pampered energies and uncultivated resources. In the earlier portion of the play, Louis is not yet "The Great." He is the Louis of Fontainebleau,—not the Louis of Versailles,—in the flush of a brilliant youth, in the excitement of a first love.

It is a task not a little arduous to convey to the spectator or the reader the notion at once of what Louis the Fourteenth appears to posterity, and of what he seemed to his contemporaries. Nor would it perhaps be possible to effect the former object, and yet to give La Vallière all her real excuses for her weakness, if fortunately in representing Louis as

the lover we did not place him in the very position most favourable to his external graces, his felicity of phrase, his magnificence of taste, his softness of feeling disguising his want of heart, and that peculiar royalty of thought and sentiment, which had the twofold advantage of rendering homely and plebeian those who rejected, bombastic and ridiculous those who adopted, the imitation.

The Duke de Lauzun,* who, in the judgment of La Bruyère, was to bequeath, in himself, an enigma to posterity, has left to our more distant examination a character sufficiently intelligible. Remarkable talents enabled him to cheat with grandeur, and to be convicted of fraud in an attitude of grace. He never was more admired than in what were called his 'misfortunes!' In other words, the merited reverses of a strong-minded rogue appeared in him but the sufferings of a philosophical hero. His genius was his destruction. Daring, versatile, sarcastic, sceptical, every thing his fate presented to him, whether of obstruction or ad-

* Lauzun was properly but a Count at the date of the Play. But as he is so well known by his latter and higher title, I have ventured on the slight anachronism.

vancement, was a trifle to be toyed with to-day, and thrown away to-morrow. With all his general lack of principle, he betrayed, it is true, occasional feelings of generosity and glimpses of an original nobleness. But I suspect that he himself would have esteemed the best part of his nature to be its weakest and most foolish. In this Play, the Duke de Lauzun is represented in that view of his multiform character which seemed to me most in keeping with the position he assumed towards both Montespan and La Vallière, and most in harmony with the grouping of my own composition. But whoever performs the part will forgive me for observing, that whatever it contains of comic must be regarded as a sign of the easy complacency with which a bold and able *intriguant* moves among things and persons that he deems his puppets, trifling, as it were, with a part beneath his real genius. His gaiety is not animal, but intellectual; —at least, such is my conception of it.

In the character of Bragelone is embodied whatever in the Play pretends to the Heroic,—it is an Episode that introduces the Epic into a Court Poem. In this character I have used my licence

of idealizing the Realities. The Bragelone of Biography died of a broken heart after Madame de La Vallière became the victim of the King. In reviving, I have dared to re-create him. In his character I seek to portray and individualize the old, chivalric, high-thoughted, and high-spirited race upon whose graves rose the reckless, profligate, and brilliant generation of Louis the Fourteenth. That splendid Sovereign, whose natural talents were perhaps greater than we are now willing to acknowledge, confirmed the form of the Monarchy, but destroyed the soul of the Aristocracy. Chivalry was the Mother of the Court, and died of her *accouchement*. Bragelone stands alone—the last of his race. His only weakness—the only infirmity which reduces him from our respect to our sympathy—is in his misplaced, but gallant and faithful love. Removed from this influence, I have wished him never to appear, but to dwarf the proportions of the Falsely-Great; thus the sarcastic Lauzun beside him sinks into the slanderous jester; the haughty Louis himself, into the abashed and superstitious criminal. But, brought under the influence of his passion, the sternness of Bragelone

is ever invaded by his softness. He is here again meant to be faithful to the age he represents—to the spirit of its knightly and crusader-like Romance. Even his adoption of the cowl is in harmony with the ancient religious character—with the Ideal of the old Franc and Germanic race, in which the warrior was the germ of the monk, and Life laid its trophies on the altar, and sought its resting-place in the cell. Where the character of Bragelone most takes its leaven from the times on which he has fallen, is in his actual experience of mankind. His dim prophecies to the King—his soliloquy on life towards the close of the fifth act—his definition of the true religion of the cloister, partake of the philosophy we form not in the closet, but in the world. Nor would these sentiments, I allow, be appropriate to Bragelone, regarded as the mere soldier; but they are of the wisdom which sorrow and disappointment may be supposed to bring to a powerful and reflective mind, which the rough contact of the world, and the actual interchange of various opinions with various men, have released from the prejudices of class and sect: and we

must remember that the sentiments he utters, as to the effect of the wars of Louis, and the real uses of the monastery, were not heresies unbroached at that day even among loyal subjects and orthodox Catholics.

I know not how far my feeble execution of this character has fallen short of the conception: I know still less how far it will produce upon the stage the more subtle and the higher effects it is intended to convey;—Alas! the Plot of the Drama does not introduce it sufficiently often, to render it worthy the acceptance of that great actor who never mistakes the conception of an Author, and yet who invariably exalts it.

May I now be permitted to pass from the Personages of this Drama to something between an explanation and an apology for my general treatment of the subject I have selected, and of the times I have portrayed. It seemed to me that subject and time alike furnished materials for the graver Comedy, no less than for the development of tragic emotions. The intrigues, the pageants, the hollowness and servility of the Court of France, the philosophy embodied by a Rochefou-

cault, the manners delineated by a Dangeau, the morality extolled by a Genlis, are not to be approached by epic declamation; they are only brought nearer to us by the glass of an easy satire, which defines the object by diminishing, not exaggerating, the proportions which our human vision is too apt to enlarge.

The beings of Versailles were, for the most part, men to whom passions (which *are* tragedy) were unknown. It was through humours (which *are* comedy) that they represented the form and the spirit of the society they created, working out, through gaiety, a solemn and a lasting moral. If this, my impression of that scene, and that time, be true, I trust I shall be pardoned, not only for the tone of the lighter portions of the play, but for the use of a diction, in such portions, which will probably sound a little prosaic to ears accustomed to the florid prettiness of modern verse, or attuned to the elaborate quaintness of the elder dramatists. To thoughts and to persons that belong to prose, belongs prosaic expression. Where the subject of itself rises into poetry, I have given whatever advantage of poetical language it is in

the power of one whom the Muse has long deserted, to command.

I now dismiss this experiment to its fate, prefaced by these (I fear tedious) observations, which may prove at least that it is not without something of preliminary study that I have ventured to diverge into a new path of that great realm of fiction, which grants indeed to indolence the shade and the fountain, but guards the fruit and the treasure, as the just monopoly of labour.*

E. L. B.

Paris, 21*st December*, 1835.

* The necessities of poetical justice have obliged me to an anachronism in the punishment of Madame de Montespan. In reality, if longer deferred, it was yet more strikingly retributive than it appears in the play. Betraying a friend, by a friend she was betrayed; the nun was avenged by the devotee; and what Montespan was to La Vallière, Maintenon was to Montespan. I should also add that the concentration and climax of interest required on the stage has obliged me to introduce Louis in the *last* scene. In my first outline of the Plot, and more in accordance with strict historical data, it was in the hotel of Madame de la Vallière (when she announced her intention of taking the veil) that the King acted that part, and uttered those sentiments which I have ascribed to him in the convent of the Carmelites.

ADVERTISEMENT.

This Play (with the above Preface) was written in the autumn and winter of 1835. It was submitted to no other opinion than that of Mr. Macready, with whom the Author had the honour of a personal acquaintance; and who, on perusal, was obligingly anxious for its performance at Drury Lane. The manager of that theatre wished, naturally perhaps, to see the manuscript before he hazarded the play; the Author (perhaps no less naturally) declined a condition from a manager, which was precisely of that nature which no author, of moderate reputation, concedes to a publisher. A writer can have but little self-respect, who does not imagine, in any new experiment in literature, that no risk can be greater than his own. Subsequently, Mr. Morris, of the Haymarket Theatre, was desirous of the right of performing the Play, and complied at once with the terms proposed. A difficulty with respect to the requisite actors obliged the Author, however, to break off the negotiation, and to decide upon confining the publication of his Drama to the press. The earnest and generous zeal of Mr. Macready, with the very prompt and liberal accedence, on the part of Mr. Osbaldiston, the present manager of Covent Garden, to the conditions of the Author, have induced him, however, to alter his intention, and to rank himself with the Neophytes of that great class of writers whose rights, some years ago, when he little thought he should ever be a humble member of so illustrious a fraternity, it was his fortune to protect and to extend.

Albany, October, 1836.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Louis the Fourteenth.
The Duke de Lauzun,
Count de Grammont,
Marquis de Montespan, } (*Courtiers.*)
The Marquis de Bragelone (*betrothed to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)
Bertrand (*the Armourer.*)

Courtiers, Gentleman of the Chamber, Priests, &c.

Madame de La Vallière.
Mademoiselle (afterwards Duchess) de La Vallière.
Madame de Montespan.
The Queen.
Abbess.

Nuns, Ladies, Maids of Honour, &c.

PROLOGUE.

To paint the Past, yet in the Past portray
Such shapes as seem dim prophets of To-Day;—
To trace, through all the garish streams of art,
Nature's deep fountain—woman's silent heart;—
On the stirr'd surface of the soften'd mind
To leave the print of holier truths behind;—
And, while through joy or grief—through calm or strife,
Bound the wild Passions on the course of Life,
To share the race—yet point the proper goal,
And make the Affections preachers to the Soul;—
Such is the aim with which a gaudier age
Now woos the brief revival of the stage;—
Such is the moral, though unseen it flows,
In Lauzun's wiles and soft La Vallière's woes;
Such the design our Author boldly drew,
And, losing boldness, now submits to YOU.
Not new to climes where dreamy FABLE dwells—
That magic Prospero of the Isle of Spells—
Now first the wanderer treads, with anxious fear,
The fairy land whose flowers allured him here.
Dread is the court our alien pleads before;
Your verdict makes his exile from the shore.
Yet, ev'n if banish'd, let him think, in pride,
He trod the path with no unhallowed guide;
Chasing the light, whose face, though veil'd and dim,
Perchance a meteor, seem'd a star to him,
Hoping the ray might rest where TRUTH appears
Beneath her native well—your smiles and tears.
When a wide waste, to Law itself unknown,
Lay that fair world the DRAMA calls its own;

When all might riot on the mines of Thought,
And Genius starv'd amidst the wealth it wrought;
He who now ventures on the haunted soil
For nobler labourers won the rights of toil,
And his the boast—that Fame now rests in ease
Beneath the shade of her own laurel trees.
Yes—if, with all the critic on their brow,
His clients once, have grown his judges now,
And watch, like spirits on the Elysian side,
Their brother ferried o'er the Stygian tide,
To where, on souls untried, austerely sit
(The triple Minos)—Gallery—Boxes—Pit—
'Twill soothe to think, howe'er the verdict end,
In every rival he hath served a friend.

But well we know, and, knowing, we rejoice,
The mightiest Critic is the PUBLIC VOICE.
Aw'd, yet resigned, our novice trusts in you,
Hard to the practised, gentle to the new.
Whate'er the anxious strife of hope and fear,
He asks no favour—let the stage be clear.
If from the life his shapes the Poet draws,
In man's deep breast lie all the critic's laws:
If not, in vain the nicely-pois'd design,
Vain the cold music of the laboured line,
Before our eyes behold the living rules;—
The soul has instincts wiser than the schools!
Yours is the Great Tribunal of the Heart,
And touch'd Emotion makes the test of Art.
Judges august!—the same in every age,
While Passions weave the sorcery of the Stage,—
While Nature's sympathies are Art's best laws,—
To you a stranger has referred his cause:—
If the soft tale he woos the soul to hear
Bequeaths the moral, while it claims the tear,
Each gentler thought, to faults in others shown,
He calls in court—a pleader for his own.

THE

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Time—sun-set. On the foreground an old Chateau; beyond, Vineyards and Woods, which present, through their openings, Views of a River, reflecting the sun-set. At a distance, the turrets of the Convent of the Carmelites.

Madame and Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

'Tis our last eve, my mother!

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Thou regrett'st it,
My own Louise! albeit the court invites thee—
A court beside whose glories, dull and dim
The pomp of eastern kings, by poets told;
A court——

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

In which I shall not see my mother!

Nor these old walls, in which, from every stone,
Childhood speaks eloquent of happy years;
Nor vines and woods, which bade me love the earth,
Nor yonder spires, which raised that love to God!—

(*The vesper bell tolls.*)

The vesper bell!—my mother, when, once more,
I hear from those grey towers that holy chime,
May thy child's heart be still as full of Heaven,
And callous to all thoughts of earth, save those
Which mirror Eden in the face of Home!

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Do I not know thy soul?—through every snare
My gentle dove shall 'scape with spotless plumes.
Alone in courts, I have no fear for *thee*;—
Some natures take from Innocence the lore
Experience teaches; and their delicate leaves,
Like the soft plant, shut out all wrong, and shrink
From vice by instinct, as the wise by knowledge:
And such is thine! *My* voice thou wilt not hear,
But Thought shall whisper where my voice would warn,
And Conscience be thy mother and thy guide!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Oh, may I merit all thy care, and most
Thy present trust!—Thou'lt write to me, my mother,
And tell me of thyself: amidst the court

My childhood's images shall rise. Be kind
To the poor cotters in the wood;—alas,
They'll miss me in the winter!—and my birds?—
Thy hand will feed them?——

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And that noble heart
That loves thee as my daughter should be loved—
The gallant Bragelone?*—should I hear
Some tidings Fame forgets—if in the din
Of camps I learn thy image makes his solace,
Shall I not write of *him*?—

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*with indifference.*)

His name will breathe
Of home and friendship;—yes!—

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Of nought beside?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, why so pressing?—let me change the theme.
The King!—you have seen him;—is he, as they say,
So fair—so stately?

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ay, in truth, my daughter,

* The author has, throughout this play, availed himself of the poetical licence to give to the name of Bragelone the Italian pronunciation, and to accent the final *e*.

A king that wins the awe he might command.
Splendid in peace, and terrible in war;
Wise in the council—gentle in the bower.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Strange, that so often through mine early dreams
A royal vision flitted;—a proud form,
Upon whose brow nature had written 'empire;'
While, on the lip,—love, smiling, wrapt in sunshine
The charmed world that was its worshipper—
A form like that which clothed the gods of old,
Lured from Olympus by some mortal maid,—
Youthful it seemed—but with ambrosial youth;
And beautiful—but half as beauty were
A garb too earthly for a thing divine:—
Was it not strange, my mother?

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

A child's fancy,
Breathed into life by thy brave father's soul.
He taught thee, in thy cradle yet, to lisp
Thy sovereign's name in prayer—and still together,
In thy first infant creed, were linked the lessons
'To HONOUR GOD, AND LOVE THE KING;' it was
A part of that old knightly faith of France
Which made it half religion to be loyal.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

It might be so. I have preserved the lesson,

Ev'n with too weak a reverence.—Yet, 'tis strange!
A dream so oft renewed!—

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Here comes thy lover!
Thou wilt not blame him if his lips repeat
The question mine have asked? Alphonso, welcome!

SCENE II.

Bragelone, Madame and Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

BRAGELONE.

My own Louise!—ah! dare I call thee so?
War never seemed so welcome! since we part,
Since the soft sunshine of thy smiles must fade
From these dear scenes, it soothes, at least, to think
I shall not linger on the haunted spot,
And feel, forlorn amidst the gloom of absence,
How dark is all once lighted by thine eyes.

[*Madame de la Vallière retires into the chateau.*

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Can friendship flatter thus?—or wouldst thou train
My ear betimes to learn the courtier's speech?

BRAGELONE.

Louise! Louise! this is our parting hour:
Me war demands—and thee the court allures.
In such an hour, the old romance allowed
The maid to soften from her coy reserve,
And her true knight, from some kind words, to take
Hope's talisman to battle!—Dear Louise!
Say, canst thou love me?—

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sir!—I!—love!—methinks
It is a word that——

BRAGELONE.

Sounds upon thy lips
Like 'land' upon the mariner's, and speaks
Of home and rest after a stormy sea.
Sweet girl, my youth has passed in camps; and war
Hath somewhat scathed my manhood ere my time.
Our years are scarce well-mated: the soft spring
Is thine, and o'er my summer's waning noon
Grave autumn creeps. Thou say'st 'I flatter!'—well,
Love taught me first the golden words in which
The honest heart still coins its massive ore.
But fairer words, from falser lips, will soon
Make *my* plain courtship rude.—Louise! thy sire

Betrothed us in thy childhood: I have watched thee
Bud into virgin May, and in thy youth
Have seemed to hoard my own!—I think of *thee*,
And I am youthful still! The passionate prayer—
The wild idolatry—the purple light
Bathing the cold earth from a Hebe's urn;—
Yea, all the soul's divine excess which youth
Claims as its own, came back when first I loved thee!
And yet so well I love, that if thy heart
Recoil from mine,—if but one single wish,
A shade more timid than the fear which ever
Blends trembling twilight with the starry hope
Of maiden dreams—would start thee from our union,
Speak, and my suit is tongueless!—

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O, my lord!
If to believe all France's chivalry
Boasts not a nobler champion,—if to feel
Proud in your friendship, honoured in your trust,—
If this be love, and I have known no other,
Why then—

BRAGELONE.

Why then, thou lov'st me!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

Shall I say it?
I feel 'twere to deceive him! Is it love?

Love!—no, it *is* not love!—(*Aloud.*) My noble lord,
As yet I know not all mine own weak heart;
I would not pain thee, yet would not betray.
Legend and song have often painted love,
And my heart whispers not the love which should be
The answer to thine own:—thou hadst best forget me!

BRAGELONE.

Forget!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I am not worthy of thee!

BRAGELONE.

Hold!—
My soul is less heroic than I deemed it.
Perchance my passion asks too much from thine,
And would forestal the fruit ere yet the blossom
Blushes from out the coy and maiden leaves.
No! let *me* love; and say, perchance the time
May come when *thou* wilt bid me *not* forget thee.
Absence may plead my cause; it hath some magic;
I fear not contrast with the courtier-herd;
And thou art not Louise if thou art won
By a smooth outside and a honeyed tongue.
No! when thou seest these hunters after power,
These shadows, minioned to the royal sun,—
Proud to the humble, servile to the great,—
Perchance thou'lt learn how much one honest heart,

That never wronged a friend or shunn'd a foe,—
How much the old hereditary knighthood,
Faithful to God, to glory, and to love,
Outweighs an universe of cringing courtiers!
Louise, I ask no more!—I bide my time!

Re-enter Madame de la Vallière from the chateau.

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

The twilight darkens. Art thou now, Alphonso,
Convinced her heart is such as thou wouldst have it?

BRAGELONE.

It is a heavenly tablet—but my name
Good angels have not writ there!

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, as yet,
Love wears the mask of friendship: she must love thee.

BRAGELONE (*half incredulously.*)

Think'st thou so?

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ay, be sure!

BRAGELONE.

I'll think so too.

(*Turns to Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

Bright lady of my heart!—(*Aside.*) By Heaven! 'tis
true!
The rose grows richer on her cheek, like hues
That, in the silence of the virgin dawn,
Predict, in blushes, light that glads the earth.
Her mother spoke aright;—ah, yes, she loves me!
Bright lady of my heart, farewell! and yet
Again—farewell!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Honour and health be with you!

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, my Louise, when warriors wend to battle,
The maid they serve grows half a warrior too;
And does not blush to bind on mailed bosoms
The banner of her colours.

BRAGELONE.

Dare I ask it?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

A soldier's child could never blush, my Lord,
To belt so brave a breast;—and yet,—well, wear it.
(*Placing her scarf round Bragelone's hauberk.*)

BRAGELONE.

Ah! add for thy sake.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

For the sake of one

Who honours worth, and ne'er since Bayard fell,
Have banners flaunted o'er a knight more true
To France and Fame;—

BRAGELONE.

And love?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, hush, my Lord;
I said not that.

BRAGELONE.

But France and Fame shall say it!
Yes, if thou hear'st men speak of Bragelone,
If proudest chiefs confess he bore him bravely,
Come life, come death, his glory shall be thine,
And all the light it borrowed from thine eyes,
Shall gild thy name. Ah! scorn not *then* to say,
'He loved me well!' How well! God shield and bless thee? [*Exit Bragelone.*

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

Most worthy love! *why* can I love him not?

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Peace to his gallant heart! when next we meet,
May I have gained a son—and thou——

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*quickly.*)

My mother,
This night let every thought be given to *thee!*

Beautiful scene, farewell!—farewell, my home!
And thou, grey convent, whose inspiring chime
Measures the hours with prayer, that morn and eve
Life may ascend the ladder of the angels,
And climb to heaven! serene retreats, farewell!
And now, my mother!—no! some hours must yet
Pass ere our parting.

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Cheer thee, my Louise!
And let us now within; the dews are falling—

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And I forgot how ill thy frame may bear them.
Pardon!—within, within!—

(*Stopping short, and gazing fondly on Madame de la Vallière*)

Your hand, dear mother!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

An old Armoury, of the heavy French Architecture preceding the time of Francis the First, in the Castle of Brâgelone.

Bertrand, the armourer, employed in polishing a sword.

BERTRAND.

There now! I think this blade will scarcely shame

My gallant master's hand; it was the weapon,
So legends say, with which the old Lord Rodolph
Slew, by the postern gate, his lady's leman!
Oh, we're a haughty race—we old French lords;
Our honour is unrusted as our steel,
And, when provoked, as ruthless!

Enter Bragelone.

BRAGELONE.

Ah, old Bertrand!
Why, your brave spirit, 'mid these coats of mail,
Grows young again. So! this, then, is the sword
You'd have me wear. God wot! a tranchant blade,
Not of the modern fashion.

BERTRAND.

My good lord,
Yourself are scarcely of the modern fashion.
They tell me, that to serve one's king for nothing,
To deem one's country worthier than one's self,
To hold one's honour not a phrase to swear by,—
They tell me, now, all *this* is out of fashion.
Come, take the sword, my lord!—you have your father's
Stout arm and lordly heart: they're out of fashion,
And yet you keep the one—come, take the other.

BRAGELONE.

Why you turn satirist!

BERTRAND.

Satirist! what is that?

BRAGELONE.

Satirists, my friend, are men who speak the truth
That courts may say—they do not know the fashion!
Satire on Vice is Wit's revenge on fools
That slander Virtue!—How now! look ye, Bertrand!
Methinks there is a notch here.

BERTRAND.

Ay, my lord;
I would not grind it out;—'twas here the blade
Clove through the helmet, ev'n unto the chin,
Of that irreverent and most scoundrel Dutchman
Who stabbed you, through your hauberk-joints—what time
You placed your breast before the king.

BRAGELONE.

Hence, ever
Be it believed, that, in his hour of need,
A king's sole safeguard are his subject's hearts!
Ha, ha! good sword! that was a famous stroke!
Thou didst brave deeds that day, thou quaint old servant,
Though now—thou'rt not the fashion!

BERTRAND.

Bless that look,

And that glad laugh! they bring me back the day
When first old Bertrand armed you for the wars,—
A fair-faced stripling; yet, beshrew my heart,
You spurred that field before the bearded chins,
And saved the gallant Lord La Vallière's standard,
And yet you were a stripling then.

BRAGELONE.

La Vallière!
The very name goes dancing through my veins.
Bertrand, look round the armoury! Is there nought
I wore that first campaign? Nay, nay! no matter!
I wear the *name within* me. Harkye, Bertrand!
We're not so young as then we were: when next
We meet, old friend, we both will end our labours,
And find some nook, amidst yon antique trophies,
Wherein to hang this idle mail.

BERTRAND.

Huzza!
The village dames speak truth—my Lord will marry!
And I shall nurse, in these old withered arms,
Another boy—for France another hero.
Ha, ha! I am so happy.

BRAGELONE.

Good old man!
Why this is like my father's hall—since thus
My father's servants love me!

BERTRAND.

All must love you !

BRAGELONE.

All !—let me think so !

(*Bugle sounds.*)

Hark, the impatient bugle !
I hear the neigh of my exultant charger,
Breathing from far the glorious air of war.
Give me the sword !

(*Enter Servant, with a letter.*)

Her mother's hand !—' Louise,
Arrived at court, writes sadly, and amidst
The splendour pines for home,'—I knew she would !
My own Louise !—' Speaks much of the King's goodness ;'—
Goodness to her !—that thought shall give the King
A tenfold better soldier !—' From thy friend,
Who trusts ere long to hail thee as her son.'
Her son !—a blessed name ! These lines shall be
My heart's true shield, and ward away each weapon.
He who shall wed Louise has conquered Fate,
And smiles at earthly foes !—Again the bugle !
Give me your hand, old man ! My fiery youth
Went not to battle with so blithe a soul
As now burns in me.—So ! she pines for home—
I knew she would—I knew it ! Farewell, Bertrand !

[*Exit Bragelone.*

BERTRAND.

Oh! there'll be merry doings in the hall
When my dear lord returns! A merry wedding,
And then—and then—oh, such a merry christening!
How well I fancy his grave manly face
Brightening upon his first-born. (*As he is going*)

Re-enter Bragelone.

BRAGELONE.

Ho, there! Bertrand!
One charge I had forgot:—Be sure they train
The woodbine richly round the western wing—
My mother's old apartment. Well, man! well!
Do you not hear me?

BERTRAND.

You, my lord! the woodbine?

BRAGELONE.

Yes; see it duly done. I know she loves it;
It clambers round her lattice. I would not
Have one thing absent she could miss.
Remember!

[*Exit Bragelone.*

BERTRAND.

And this is he whom Warriors call 'the Stern!'
The dove's heart beats beneath that lion breast.
Pray Heaven his lady may deserve him! Oh,

What news for my good dame!—i'faith, I'm glad
I was the first to learn the secret. So!
This year a wife—next year a boy! I'll teach
The young rogue how his father clove the Dutchman
Down to the chin! Ha, ha! old Bertrand now
Will be of use again on winter nights,—
I know he'll be the picture of his father!

[*Exit Bertrand.*

SCENE IV.

An Ante-chamber in the Palace of Fontainebleau.

Enter Lauzun and Grammont, at opposite doors.

LAUZUN.

Ah, Count, good day!—Were you at court last night?

GRAMMONT.

Yes; and the court is grown the richer by
A young new beauty.

LAUZUN.

So!—her name?

GRAMMONT.

La Vallière!

LAUZUN.

Ay, I have heard;—a maid of honour?

GRAMMONT.

Yes.
The women say she's plain.

LAUZUN.

The women! oh,
The case it is that's plain—*she* must be lovely!

GRAMMONT.

The dear, kind, gossips of the court, declare
The pretty novice hath conceived a fancy—
A wild, romantic, innocent, strange fancy—
For our young King; a girlish love, like that
Told of in fairy tales: she saw his picture,
Sighed to the canvas, murmured to the colours,
And—fell in love with carmine and gambouge.

LAUZUN.

The simple dreamer! Well, she saw the king?

GRAMMONT.

And while she saw him, like a rose, when May

Breathes o'er its bending bloom, she seemed to shrink
Into her modest self, and a low sigh
Shook blushes (sweetest rose-leaves!) from her beauty.

LAUZUN.

You paint it well.

GRAMMONT.

And ever since that hour
She bears the smiling malice of her comrades
With an unconscious and an easy sweetness;
As if alike *her* virtue and *his* greatness
Made love impossible:—so, down the stream
Of purest thought, her heart glides on to danger.

LAUZUN.

Did Louis note her?—Has he heard the gossip?

GRAMMONT.

Neither, methinks: his Majesty is cold.
The art of pomp, and not the art of love,
Tutors his skill—Augustus more than Ovid.

LAUZUN.

The time will come! The King as yet is young,
Flush'd with the novelty of sway, and fired
With the great dream of cutting Dutchmen's throats:
A tiresome dream—the poets call it 'Glory.'

GRAMMONT.

So much the better,—'tis one rival less;
The handsome King would prove a dangerous
suitor.

LAUZUN.

Oh, hang the danger!—He must have a mistress;
'Tis an essential to a court: how many
Favours, one scarcely likes to ask a King,
One flatters from a King's inamorata!
We courtiers fatten on the royal vices;
And, while the King lives chaste, he cheats, he
robs me
Of ninety-nine per cent!

GRAMMONT.

Ha, ha!—Well, Duke,
We meet again to-night. You join the revels?
Till then, adieu!

LAUZUN.

Adieu, dear Count!

[*Exit Grammont.*

The King
Must have a mistress: I must lead that mistress.
The times are changed!—'twas by the sword and
spear

Our fathers bought ambition—vulgar butchers!
But now our wit's our spear—intrigue our armour;
The ante-chamber is our field of battle;
And the best hero is—the cleverest rogue!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

SCENE V.

Night—the Gardens of the Fontainebleau, brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps—Fountains, vases, and statues in perspective—A pavilion in the background—to the right, the Palace of the Fontainebleau, illuminated.*

Enter Courtiers, Ladies, &c.

A Dance.

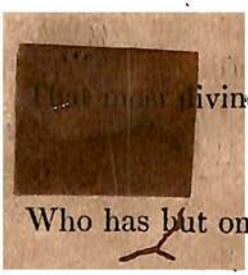
Then enter Grammont and Lauzun.

LAUZUN.

A brilliant scene!

* The effect of the scene should be principally made by jets-d'eau, waterfalls, &c.

GRAMMONT.



And see! to make it brighter,
That most divine, diverting, pompous Marquis—

LAUZUN.

Who has but one idea, and two phrases!

GRAMMONT.

The one idea—that he is a marquis!
And the two phrases?

LAUZUN.

Let himself inform you.

Enter the Marquis de Montespan, ridiculously over-dressed.

MONTESPAN.

My Lords, I'm charmed to see you!—How's your health,
Dear Count?

GRAMMONT.

But poorly, Sir.

MONTESPAN.

I'm in despair!
And yours?

LAUZUN.

Most flourishing!

MONTESPAN.

I'm charmed—enraptured!

LAUZUN.

Why don't you bring your wife to court, dear Marquis?

MONTESPAN.

My wife!—(what's that to him?)—she hates the pomp,
And stays at home to think of *me*—and bless
The fate that made her—

LAUZUN.

Married to a Marquis!

MONTESPAN.

Precisely so!

LAUZUN.

And such a Marquis!

MONTESPAN.

Oh!
You are too bad!—have done!

LAUZUN.

The very words
Your lovely lady said when last I saw her!

MONTESPAN.

She co[illegible] 'tis natural!—

GRAMMONT.

Hist!—the King!

Enter Louis, followed by Courtiers, &c.

LOUIS.

Fair eve and pleasant revels to you all!
Ah, Duke!—a word with you!

(*Courtiers give way.*)

Thou hast seen, my Lauzun,
The new and fairest floweret of our court,
This youngest of the graces—sweet La Vallière,
Blushing beneath the world's admiring eyes?

LAUZUN (*aside.*)

(So, so!—he's caught!) Your Majesty speaks warmly;
Your praise is just—and grateful—

LOUIS.

Grateful?

LAUZUN.

Ay.
Know you not, Sire, it is the jest, among

The pretty prattlers of the royal chamber,
That this young Dian of the woods has found
Endymion in a king,—a summer dream,
Bright, but with vestal fancies !—scarcely love,
But that wild interval of hopes and fears
Through which the child glides, trembling, to the woman ?

LOUIS.

Blest thought ! Oh what a picture of delight
Your words have painted !—

LAUZUN.

While we speak, behold,
Through yonder alleys, with her sister planets,
Your moonlight beauty gleams.

LOUIS.

'Tis she !—this shade
Shall hide us !—quick—

[*Enters one of the bosquets.*

LAUZUN (*following him.*)

I trust my creditors
Will grow the merrier from this night's adventure !

Enter Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and Maids of Honour.

FIRST MAID.

How handsome looks the Duke de Guiche to-night !

SECOND MAID.

Well! to my taste, the graceful Grammont bears
The bell from all!—

THIRD MAID.

But, then, that charming Lauzun
Has so much wit!

FIRST MAID.

And which, of all these gallants,
May please the fair La Vallière most?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

In truth
I scarcely marked them; when the King is by,
Who can have eye, or ear, or thought for others?

FIRST MAID.

You raise your fancies high!

SECOND MAID.

And raise them vainly!
The King disdains all love!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Who spoke of love?
The sunflower, gazing on the Lord of heaven,

Asks but its sun to shine!—Who spoke of love?
And who would wish the bright and lofty Louis
To stoop from glory? Love should not confound
So great a spirit with the herd of men.
Who spoke of love?——

FIRST MAID.

My country friend, you talk
Extremely well; but some young lord will teach you
To think of Louis less, and more of love.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, ev'n the very presence of his greatness
Exalts the heart from each more low temptation.
He seems to walk the earth as if to raise
And purify our wandering thoughts, by fixing
Thought on himself;—and she who thinks on Louis
Shuts out the world, and scorns the name of love!

FIRST MAID.

Wait till you're tried— (*Music.*)
But, hark! the music chides us
For wasting this most heavenly night so idly.
Come! let us join the dancers.

[*Exeunt Maids.*

(*As La Vallière follows, the King steals from the bosquet, and takes her hand, while Lauzun retires in the opposite direction.*)

LOUIS.

Sweet La Vallière!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ah!—

LOUIS.

Nay, fair lady, fly not, ere we welcome
Her who gives night its beauty!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire, permit me!
My comrades wait me.

LOUIS.

What! my loveliest subject
So soon a rebel? Silent!—Well, *be* mute,
And teach the world the eloquence of blushes.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I may not listen—

LOUIS.

What if *I* had set
Thyself the example? What if I had listened,
Veiled by yon friendly boughs, and dared to dream
That one blest word which spoke of Louis absent
Might charm his presence, and make Nature music?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You did not, Sire! you could not!

LOUIS.

Could not hear thee,
Nor pine for these divine, unwitnessed moments,
To pray thee, dearest lady, to divorce
No more the thought of love from him who loves thee,
And—faithful still to glory—swears thy heart
Unfolds the fairest world a king can conquer!
Hear me, Louise!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

No, Sire; forget those words!
I am not what their foolish meaning spoke me,
But a poor simple girl, who loves her King,
And honour *more!* Forget, and do not scorn me!

[*Exit Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*

LOUIS.

Her modest coyness fires me more than all
Her half-unconscious and most virgin love.

(*Enter Queen, Courtiers, Ladies, Guests, &c.; Lauzun, Grammont, and Montespan.*)

Well, would the dancers pause awhile?

QUEEN.

Ev'n pleasure
Wearies at last.

LOUIS.

We've but to change its aspect,
And it resumes its freshness.—Ere the banquet
Calls us, my friends, we have prepared a game
To shame the lottery of this life, wherein
Each prize is neighboured by a thousand blanks.
Methinks it is the duty of a monarch
To set the balance right, and bid the wheel
Shower nought but prizes on the hearts he loves.
What ho, there! with a merry music, raise
Fortune, to shew how Merit conquers Honours!

Music.

(*The pavilion at the back of the stage opens, and discovers the Temple of Fortune, superbly illuminated. Fortune; at her feet, a wheel of light; at either hand, a golden vase, over each of which presides a figure — the one representing Merit, the other Honour.*)

LOUIS.

Approach, fair dames and gallants! Aye, as now,
May Fortune smile upon the friends of Louis.

(*The Courtiers and ladies groupe around the vases. From the one over which Merit presides they draw lots, and receive in return from Honour various gifts of jewels, &c.*)

(*Enter Mademoiselle de la Vallière at the back of the stage. The King joins and converses with her in dumb show.*)

MONTESPAN.

Now then for me!—

(*Draws and receives a necklace.*)

A very lovely trinket!

LAUZUN (*followed by an old Lady of the Court.*)

Out on my stars!—there is a dear old woman
Who takes my notes to Montespan's fair wife,
And wants a present; if I give the ring
I drew, the haridan will play town-crier,
And all the Court will laugh at Lauzun's taste,
And take the wrinkled Mercury for my Venus.
Oho! the Marquis! 'faith I'll make him pay
My messenger to Madame.

MONTESPAN.

How it glitters!
Ten thousand crowns at least! it sha'n't go under!

LAUZUN (*taking the necklace.*)

Prithee, indulge me, Marquis; tell me, now,
What would you do with this poor bauble?

MONTESPAN.

What?
Why, (let it be between us!—not a word
To my dear wife!) I'll turn it into monies.

LAUZUN.

Fie on you, Marquis, you disgrace our order;
It ought to make your fortune as a man
Of taste and gallantry.

(*Turns to Old Lady.*)

Ah, Madame, see
What luck our Marquis has!

OLD LADY.

Superb! the first
Water!

MONTESPAN.

She has the water in her mouth;
Liquorish old jade!

LAUZUN.

What, you admire the toy?

OLD LADY.

Nay, who would not?

LAUZUN.

The Marquis begs you'll give it
The worth such trifles take when worn by beauty!

MONTESPAN.

I—I—I'm in despair! Don't be so silly.

OLD LADY.

Sweet Marquis, you're too gallant.

LAUZUN.

Yes, he says,
He shall be in despair if you disdain it.

(*Old Lady puts on the necklace, curtsies profoundly to Montespan, and retires.*)

There, Marquis; there, I've done it.

MONTESPAN.

Done it! yes!
Nice doings!

LAUZUN.

Hush! her great grand niece's cousin
Is aunt to the third cousin of a maid
Of honour to the Queen—you understand me?

MONTESPAN.

And what of that? I drew a necklace, Sir,
Not that old woman's pedigree from Adam.

LAUZUN.

Your wit is dense to-night, my dearest Marquis;
If you reflect, you'll see the Queen must hear of it.

MONTESPAN (*softened.*)

Aha! I see,—the Queen will hear of it!

LAUZUN.

And cry to Louis, 'What a generous man
Is that sweet Marquis!'

MONTESPAN.

Well now, I'm enraptured!

LOUIS.

(*To Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

Nay, if you smile not on me, then the scene
Hath lost its charm.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O Sire, all eyes are on us!

LOUIS.

All eyes *should* learn where homage should be rendered.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I pray you, Sire—

THE QUEEN.

Will't please your Majesty
To try your fortune?

(*Looks scornfully at Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

LOUIS.

Fortune! Sweet La Vallière,
I only seek my fortune in thine eyes.

(*Music. Louis draws, and receives a diamond bracelet. Ladies crowd round.*)

FIRST LADY.

How beautiful!

SECOND LADY.

Each gem were worth a duchy

THIRD LADY.

Oh, happy she upon whose arm the King
Will bind the priceless band!

LOUIS.

(*Approaching Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

Permit me, Lady.

(*Clasps the bracelet.*)

LAUZUN.

Well done—well play'd! In that droll game call'd Woman,
Diamonds are always trumps for hearts.

FIRST LADY.

Her hair's
Too light!

SECOND LADY.

Her walk is so provincial!

THIRD LADY.

D'ye think she paints?

LAUZUN.

Ha! ha! What envious eyes,
What fawning smiles, await the King's new Mistress!

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Gardens of the Fontainebleau.

Enter Bragelone.

BRAGELONE.

Why did we suffer her to seek the court?
It is a soil in which the reptile Slander
Still coils in slime around the fairest flower.
Can it be true?—Strange rumours pierced my tent
Coupling her name with—pah!—how foul the thought is!—
The maid the King loves!—Fie! I'll not believe it!
I left the camp—sped hither: if she's lost,
Why then!—down—down, base heart! wouldst *thou* suspect her?
Thou—who shouldst be her shelter from suspicion?
But I may warn, advise, protect, and save her—
Save—'tis a fearful word!

Enter Lauzun.

LAUZUN.

Lord Bragelone!
Methought your warrior spirit never breathed
The air of palaces! No evil tidings,
I trust, from Dunkirk?

BRAGELONE.

No. The *fleur-de-lis*
Rears her white crest unstained. Mine own affairs
Call me to court.

LAUZUN.

Affairs! I hate the word;
It sounds like debts.

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

This courtier may instruct me.
(*Aloud.*) Our King—he bears him well?

LAUZUN.

Oh, bravely, Marquis;
Engaged with this new palace of Versailles.
It costs some forty millions!

BRAGELONE.

Ay, the People
Groan at the burthen!

LAUZUN.

People !—what's the *People?*
I never heard that word at court !—The *People !*

BRAGELONE.

I doubt not, Duke. The People, like the Air,
Is rarely heard, save when it speaks in thunder.
I pray you grace for that old-fashioned phrase.
What is the latest news ?

LAUZUN.

His majesty
Dines half an hour before his usual time.
That's the last news at court !—it makes sensation !

BRAGELONE.

Is there no weightier news ? I heard at Dunkirk
How the King loved a——loved a certain maiden—
The brave La Vallière's daughter !

LAUZUN.

How, my Lord,
How can you vegetate in such a place ?
I fancy the next tidings heard at Dunkirk
Will be that—Adam's dead !

BRAGELONE.

The news is old, then ?

LAUZUN.

News! *news*, indeed! Why, by this time, our lackeys
Have worn the gossip threadbare! News!——

BRAGELONE.

The lady
(She is a soldier's child) hath not yet bartered
Her birthright for ambition? She rejects him?
Speak!—She rejects him?

LAUZUN.

Humph!

BRAGELONE.

Oh, Duke, I know
This courtier air—this most significant silence—
With which your delicate race are wont to lie
Away all virtue! Shame upon your manhood!
Speak out, and say Louise la Vallière lives
To prove to courts—that woman *can* be honest!

LAUZUN.

Marquis, you're warm.

BRAGELONE.

You dare not speak!—I knew it!

LAUZUN.

Dare not?

BRAGELONE.

Oh, yes, you dare, with hints and smiles,
To darken fame—to ruin the defenceless—
Blight with a gesture—wither with a sneer!
Did I say 'dare not?'—No man dares it better!

LAUZUN.

My Lord, these words must pass not!

BRAGELONE.

Duke, forgive me!
I am a rough, stern soldier—taught from youth
To brave offence, and by the sword alone
Maintain the licence of my speech. Oh, say—
Say, but one word!—say this poor maid is sinless,
And, for her father's sake—(*her father* loved me!)
I'll kneel to thee for pardon!

LAUZUN.

Good, my Lord,
I know not what your interest in this matter:
'Tis said that Louis loves the fair La Vallière;
But what of that?—good taste is not a crime!
'Tis said La Vallière does not hate the King;
But what of that?—it does but prove her—loyal!
I know no more. I trust you're satisfied;
If not———

BRAGELONE.

Thou liest!

LAUZUN.

Nay, then, draw!

(*They fight—after a few passes, Lauzun is disarmed.*)

BRAGELONE.

There, take
Thy sword! Alas! each slanderer wears a weapon
No honest arm can baffle—*this* is edgeless.

[*Exit Bragelone.*

LAUZUN.

Pleasant! This comes, now, of one's condescending
To talk with men who cannot understand
The tone of good society.—Poor fellow!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

SCENE II.

Enter Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He loves me, then! He loves me! Love! wild word!
Did I say love? Dishonour, shame, and crime
Dwell on the thought! And yet—and yet—*he loves me!*

elone, at the back of the stage.—She es out the King's picture.)

ams were prophets!—Steps! The

BRAGELONE.

No, lady; pardon me!—a joint mistake;
You sought the King—and *I* Louise la Vallière!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You here, my Lord!—you here!

BRAGELONE.

There was a maiden
Fairer than many fair; but sweet and humble,
And good and spotless, through the vale of life
She walked, her modest path with blessings strewed;
(For all men bless'd her;) from her crystal name,
Like the breath i' the mirror, even envy passed:
I sought that maiden at the court; none knew her.
May I ask you—where now Louise la Vallière?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Cruel!—unjust!—You were my father's friend,
Dare you speak thus to me?

BRAGELONE.

Dare! dare!—'Tis well!
You have learnt your state betimes!——

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My state, my Lord!
I know not by what right you thus assume
The privilege of insult!

BRAGELONE.

Ay, reproach!
The harlot's trick—for shame! Oh, no, your pardon!
You are too high for shame: and so—farewell!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My Lord!—my Lord, in pity—No!—in *justice*,
Leave me not thus!

BRAGELONE.

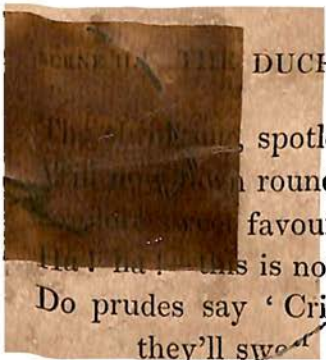
Louise!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Have they belied me?
Speak, my good Lord!—What crime have I committed?

BRAGELONE.

No crime—at courts! 'Tis only Heaven and Honour
That deem it aught but—most admired good fortune!
Many, who swept in careless pride before



spotless, timorous La Vallière,
round thee, and with bended knees
favour of the King's kind mistress.
s is not crime! Who calls it crime?
Do prudes say 'Crime?' Go, bribe them, and
they'll swear
Its name is greatness. Crime, indeed!—ha! ha!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My heart finds words at length!—'Tis false!

BRAGELONE.

'Tis false!
Why speak again! Say once more it is false—
'Tis false!—again, *'tis false!*

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O God, I'm wretched!

BRAGELONE.

No, lady, no! not wretched, if not guilty!

(*Mademoiselle de la Vallière, after walking to and fro in great agitation, seats herself on one of the benches of the garden, and covers her face with her hands.*)

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

Are these the tokens of remorse? No matter!
I loved her well!—And love is pride, not love,
If it forsake ev'n guilt amidst its sorrows!

(*Aloud.*)

Louise! Louise!—Speak to thy friend, Louise!
Thy father's friend!—thine own!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

This hated court!
Why came I hither?—Wherefore have I closed
My heart against its own most pleading dictates?
Why clung to virtue, if the brand of vice
Sear my good name?—

BRAGELONE.

That, when thou pray'st to God,
Thy soul may ask for *comfort*—not *forgiveness!*

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*rising eagerly.*)

A blessed thought!—I thank thee!

BRAGELONE.

Thou art innocent!
Thou hast denied the King?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I *have* denied him!

BRAGELONE.

Curs'd be the lies that wrong'd thee!—doubly curst
The hard, the icy selfishness of soul,
That, but to pander to an hour's caprice,
Blasted that flower of life—fair fame! Accurst
The King who casts his purple o'er his vices!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Hold!—thou malign'st thy king!

BRAGELONE.

He spared not thee!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

The king—God bless him!

BRAGELONE.

Wouldst thou madden me?
Thou!—No—thou lov'st him not?—thou hid'st thy face!
Woman, thou tremblest! Lord of Hosts, for this
Hast thou preserved me from the foeman's sword,
And through the incarnadined and raging seas
Of war upheld my steps?—made life and soul
The sleepless priests to that fair idol—Honour?
Was it for this?—I loved thee not, Louise,
As gallants love! Thou wert this life's IDEAL,
Breathing through earth the Lovely and the Holy,
And clothing Poetry in human beauty!
When in this gloomy world they spoke of sin,
I thought of thee, and smiled—for thou wert sinless!
And when they told of some diviner act
That made our nature noble, my heart whispered—
'So would have done Louise!'—'Twas thus I loved thee!

To lose thee, I can bear it ; but to lose,
With thee, all hope, all confidence, of virtue—
This—*this* is hard !—Oh ! I am sick of earth !.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Nay, speak not thus !—be gentle with me. Come,
I am not what thou deem'st me, Bragelone ;
Woman I am, and weak. Support, advise me !
Forget the lover, but be still the friend.
Do not desert me—*thou !*

BRAGELONE.

Thou lov'st the King !

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

But I can fly from love !

BRAGELONE.

Poor child ! And whither ?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Take me to the old castle, to my mother !

BRAGELONE.

The king can reach thee there !

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He'll not attempt it.
Alas ! in courts, how quickly men forget !

BRAGELONE.

Not till their victim hath surrendered all !
Hadst thou but yielded, why thou mightst have
lived

Beside his very threshold, safe, unheeded;
But thus, with all thy bloom of heart unrifled,—
The fortress stormed, not conquered,—why man's pride,
If not man's lust, would shut thee from escape
Art thou in earnest,—wouldst thou truly fly
From gorgeous infamy to tranquil honour,
God's house alone may shelter thee!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

The convent!
Alas! alas! to meet those eyes no more!
Never to hear that voice!

BRAGELONE (*departing.*)

Enough.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yet, stay!
I'll see him once! one last farewell—and then—
Yes, to the convent!

BRAGELONE.

I have done!—and yet,
Ere I depart, take back the scarf thou gav'st me.
Then didst 'thou honour worth!' now, gift and giver
Alike are worthless!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIERE.

Worthless! Didst thou hear me?
Have I not said that——

BRAGELONE.

Thou wouldst see the King!
Vice first, and virtue after! O'er the marge
Of the abyss thou tremblest! One step more,
And from all heaven the Angels shall cry '*Lost!*'
Thou ask'st that single step! Wouldst thou be saved,
Lose not a moment!—Come!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*in great agony.*)

Beside that tree,
When stars shone soft, he vowed for aye to love me!

BRAGELONE.

Think of thy mother! At this very hour
She blesses God that thou wert born—the last
Fair scion of a proud and stainless race!
To-morrow, and thy shame may cast a shade
Over a hundred 'scutcheons, and thy mother
Feel thou wert born that *she* might long to die!
Come!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I am ready—take my hand!
(*Her eye falls on the bracelet.*)
Away!
This is his gift! And shall I leave him thus?
Not one kind word to break the shock of parting—

BRAGELONE.

And [illegible] heart!

LA VALLIÈRE.

Be still! Thou'st man!
Thou canst not [illegible] woman feels!—her weakness
Thou canst not sound! O Louis, Heaven protect thee!
May Fate look on thee with La Vallière's eyes!
Now I am ready, sir! Thou'st seen how weak
Woman is ever where she loves. *Now*, learn,
Proportioned to that weakness is the strength
With which she conquers love!—O Louis! Louis!
Quick! take me hence!—

BRAGELONE.

The heart she wrongs hath saved her!
And is that all!—The shelter for mine age—
The Hope that was the garner for Affection—
The fair and lovely tree, beneath whose shade
The wearied soldier thought to rest at last,
And watch life's sun go calm and cloudless down,
Smiling the day to sleep—all, all lie shattered!
No matter! I have saved thy soul from sorrow;
Whose hideous depth thy vision cannot fathom.
Joy!—I have saved thee!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ah! when last we parted,
I told thee, of thy love I was not worthy.
Another shall replace me!

BRAGELONE (*smiling sadly.*)

Hush! Another!
No!—See, I wear thy colours still!—Though Hope
Wanes from the plate, the diamond still remains,
And takes no light from stars! I—*I* am nothing!
But thou—Nay, weep not! Yet these tears are honest:
Thou hast not lived to make the Past one blot,
Which life in vain would weep away! Poor maiden!
I could not cheer thee *then*. *Now*, joy!—I've saved thee!

[*Exeunt Mademoiselle de la Vallière and Bragelone.*

SCENE III.

The King's Cabinet at Fontainebleau; the King seated at a table, covered with papers, &c. writing.*

Enter Lauzun.

LOUIS.

Lauzun, I sent for you. Your zeal has served me,

* To some it may be interesting to remember that this cabinet, in which the most powerful of the Bourbon kings is represented as rewarding the minister of his pleasures, is the same as that in which is yet shewn the table upon which Napoleon Bonaparte (son of a gentleman of Corsica) signed the abdication of the titles and the dominions of Charlemagne!

There, this order gives you
f De Vesci.

LAUZUN.

Sire,
How shall I thank your goodness?

LOUIS.

Hush!—by silence!

LAUZUN (*aside.*)

A king's forbidden fruit has pretty windfalls!

LOUIS.

This beautiful Louise! I never loved
Till now.

LAUZUN

She yields not yet?

LOUIS.

But gives refusal
A voice that puts ev'n passion to the blush
To own one wish so soft a heart denies it!

LAUZUN.

A woman's No! is but a crooked path
Unto a woman's Yes! Your Majesty
Saw her to-day?

LOUIS.

No!—Grammont undertakes

To bear, in secret, to her hand, some lines
That pray a meeting.—I await his news.
(*Continues writing.*)

LAUZUN (*aside*)

I'll not relate my tilt with Bragelone.
First, I came off the worst.—No man of sense
Ever confesses that! And, secondly,
This most officious, curious, hot-brained Quixote
Might make him jealous; jealous kings are peevish;
And, if he fall to questioning the lady,
She'll learn who told the tale, and spite the teller.
Oh! the great use of logic!

LOUIS.

'Tis in vain
I strive by business to beguile impatience!
How my heart beats!—Well, Count!

Enter Grammont.

GRAMMONT.

Alas! my Liege!

LOUIS.

Alas!—Speak out!

GRAMMONT.

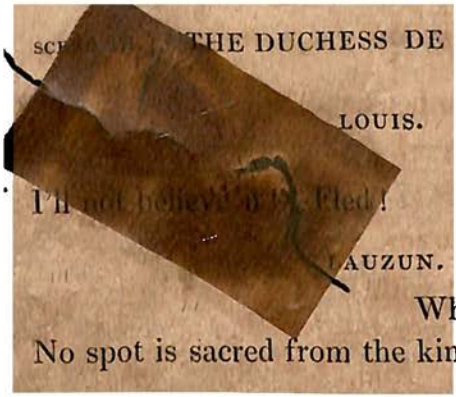
The court has lost La Vallière!

LOUIS.

Ha!—lost!

GRAMMONT.

She has fled, and none guess whither.



LOUIS.

Fled!

I'll not believe it. Fled!

LAUZUN.

What matters, Sire?
No spot is sacred from the king!

LOUIS.

By Heaven
I *am* a king!—Not all the arms of Europe
Could wrest one jewel from my crown. And she—
What is my crown to her? I am a king!
Who stands between the king and her he loves
Becomes a traitor—and may find a tyrant!
Follow me! [*Exit Louis.*

GRAMMONT.

Who e'er heard of maids of honour
Flying from kings?

LAUZUN.

Ah, had *you* been a maid,
How kind you would have been, you rogue!—
Come on!

[*Exeunt Lauzun and Grammont.*

SCENE IV.

Interior of a Convent Chapel; a lofty Crucifix in the centre of the aisle, before which kneels Mademoiselle de la Vallière; Night—Thunder and Lightning, the latter made visible through the long oriel windows.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*rising.*)

Darkly the night sweeps on. No thought of sleep
Steals to my heart. What sleep is to the world
Prayer is to me—life's balm, and grief's oblivion!
Yet, ev'n before the altar of my God,
Unhallowed fire is raging through my veins—
Heav'n on my lips, but earth within my heart—
And while I pray *his* memory prompts the prayer,
And all I ask of Heaven is—'Guard my Louis!'
Forget him—*that* I dare not pray! I would not
Ev'n if I could, be happy, and forget him!

[*Thunder.*

Roll on, roll on, dark chariot of the storm.
Whose wheels are thunder!—the rack'd elements
Can furnish forth no tempest like the war
Of passions in one weak and erring heart!

[*The bell tolls one.*

Hark to night's funeral knell! How through the roar
Of winds and thunder thrills that single sound,
Solemnly audible!—the tongue of time,
In time's most desolate hour!—it bids us muse
On worlds which love can reach not! Life runs fast
To its last sands! To bed, to bed!—to tears
And wishes for the grave!—to bed, to bed!

[*A trumpet is heard without.*

Two or three Nuns hurry across the stage.

FIRST NUN.

Most strange!

SECOND NUN.

In such a night, too! The great gates,
That ne'er unclose save to a royal guest,
Unbarred!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIERE.

What fear, what hope, by turns distracts me!

[*The trumpet sounds again.*

FIRST NUN.

Hark! in the court, the ring of hoofs!—the door
Creaks on the sullen hinge!

LAUZUN (*without.*)

Make way!—the King!

Enter Louis and Lauzun.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE. (*rushing forward.*)

Oh, Louis!—oh, belov'd! (*Then pausing abruptly.*)
No, touch me not!
Leave me! in pity leave me! Heavenly Father,
I fly to thee! Protect me from his arms—
Protect me from myself!

[*Sinks at the foot of the crucifix.*

LOUIS.

Oh bliss!—Louise!

Enter Abbess and other Nuns.

ABBESS.

Peace, peace! What clamour desecrates the shrine
And solitudes of God?

LAUZUN.

Madam, your knee—
The King!

ABBESS.

The King!—you mock me, sir!

LOUIS (*quitting Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

Behold
Your Sovereign, reverend Mother! We have come
To thank you for your shelter of this lady,
And to reclaim our charge.

ABBESS.

My Liege, these walls
Are sacred even from the purple robe
And sceptred hand.

LOUIS.

She hath not ta'en the vow!
She's free!—we claim her!—she is of our court!
Woman,—go to!

ABBESS.

The maiden, Sire, is free!
Your royal lips have said it!—She is free!
And if this shrine her choice, whoe'er compels her
Forth from the refuge, doth incur the curse
The Roman Church awards to even Kings!
Speak, lady!—dost thou claim against the court
The asylum of the cloister?

LOUIS.

Darest thou brave us?

LAUZUN (*aside to Louis.*)

Pardon, my Liege!—reflect! Let not the world
Say that the king—

LOUIS.

Can break his bonds!—Away!
I was a man before I was a king!
(*Approaching Mademoiselle de la Vallière.*)

Lady, we do command your presence! (*Lowering his voice.*) Sweet!
Adored Louise!—if ever to your ear
My whispers spoke in music—if my life
Be worth the saving, do not now desert me!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*clinging to the crucifix.*)

Let me not hear him, Heaven!—Strike all my senses!
Make—make me dumb, deaf, blind,—but keep me honest!

ABBESS.

Sire, you have heard her answer!

LOUIS (*advancing passionately, pauses, and then with great dignity.*)

Abbess, no!
This lady was entrusted to our charge—
A fatherless child!—The King is now her father!
Madam, we would not wrong you; but we know
That sometimes most unhallowed motives wake
Your zeal for converts!—This young maid is wealthy,
And nobly born!—Such proselytes may make
A convent's pride, but oft a convent's victims!
No more!—we claim the right the law awards us,
Free and alone to commune with this maiden.

If then her choice go with you—be it so;
We are no tyrant! Peace!—retire!

ABBESS.

My Liege!
Forgive—

LOUIS.

We do!—Retire!

(*Lauzun, the Abbess, &c., withdraw.*)

LOUIS.

We are alone!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Alone!—No! God is present, and the conscience!

LOUIS.

Ah! fear'st thou, then, that heart that would resign
Ev'n love itself to guard one pang from thee?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (*rising, but still with one arm clinging to the crucifix.*)

I *must* speak!—Sire, if every drop of blood
Were in itself a life, I'd shed them all
For one hour's joy to thee!—But fame and virtue—
My father's grave—my mother's lonely age—
These, these—

(*Thunder.*)

I hear their voice!—the fires of Heaven
Seem to me like the eyes of angels, and
Warn me against myself!—Farewell!

LOUIS.

Louise,
I will not hear thee! What! farewell? that word
Sounds like a knell to all that's worth the living!
Farewell! why, then, farewell all peace to Louis
And the poor King is once more but a thing
Of state and forms. The impulse and the passion—
The blessed air of happy human life—
The all that made him envy not his subjects
Dies in that word! Ah, canst thou—dar'st thou say it?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Oh, speak not thus!—Speak harshly!—threat: command!—
Be all the King!

LOUIS.

The King! he kneels to thee!
[*Lightning.*

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Not there!—not at the cross!—the angry lightning,
See how it darts around!—not there!

LOUIS (*passing his arm round her.*)

So ever
Would this heart guard thine own!

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

In mercy leave me!
I'm weak—be generous! My own soul betrays me;
But *thou* betray me not!

LOUIS.

Nay, hear me, sweet one!—
Desert me not this once, and I will swear
To know no guiltier wish—to curb my heart—
To banish hope from love—and nurse no dream
Thy spotless soul itself shall blush to cherish?
Hear me, Louise—thou lov'st me?

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Love thee, Louis!

LOUIS.

Thou lov'st me,—then confide! Who loves, *trusts* ever!

(*Mademoiselle de la Vallière has insensibly let go her hold of the cross, and now placing her hand on his arm, looks him in the face.*)

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Trust thee!—ah! *dare* I?

LOUIS (*clasping her in his arms.*)

Ay, till death! What ho!
Lauzun! I say!

Enter Lauzun.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

(*Endeavouring again to cling to the cross.*)

No, no!

LOUIS.

Not trust me, dearest?

(*She falls on his shoulder—the Abbess and Nuns advance.*)

ABBESS.

Still firm!

LAUZUN.

No, Madam!—Way, there, for the King!

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

An Ante-Chamber in the Palace of Madame la Duchesse de la Vallière at Versailles.

Enter Lauzun and Madame de Montespan, at opposite doors.

LAUZUN.

Ha! my fair friend, well met!—how fares Athenè?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Weary with too much gaiety! Now, tell me,
Do *you* ne'er tire of splendor? Does this round
Of gaudy pomps—this glare of glitt'ring nothings—
Does it ne'er pall upon you? To my eyes
'Tis as the earth would be if turfed with scarlet,
Without one spot of green.

LAUZUN.

We all feel thus
Until we are used to it. Art has grown *my* nature,

And if I see green fields, or ill-dressed people,
I cry 'how artificial!' With me, '*Nature*'
Is 'Paris and Versailles.' The word, 'a man,'
Means something noble, that one sees at court.
Woman's the thing Heaven made for wearing trinkets
And talking scandal. That's my state of nature!
You'll like it soon; you have that temper which
Makes courts its element.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

And how?—define, Sir.

LAUZUN.

First, then—but shall I not offend?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Be candid.
I'd know my faults, to make them look like virtues.

LAUZUN.

First, then, Athenè, you've an outward frankness.
Deceit in you looks honester than truth.
Thoughts, at a court, like faces on the stage,
Require some rouge. You rouge your thoughts so well
That one would deem their only fault, that nature
Gave them too bright a bloom!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Proceed!

LAUZUN.

Your wit,
Is of the true court breed—it plays with nothings;
Just bright enough to warm, but never burn—
Excites the dull, but ne'er offends the vain.
You have much energy; it looks like feeling!
Your cold ambition seems an easy impulse;
Your head most ably counterfeits the heart,
But never, like the heart, betrays itself!
Oh! you'll succeed at court!—you see I know you!
Not so this new-made Duchess—young La Vallière.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

The weak, fond, fool!

LAUZUN.

Yes, weak—*she* has a heart;
Yet *you*, too, love the King!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

And she does *not!*
She loves but *Louis*—I but love the *King:*
Pomp, riches, state, and power—these who would love not?

LAUZUN.

Bravo! well said!—Oh, you'll succeed at court!
I knew it well! it was for this I chose you—
Induced your sapient lord to waste no more
Your beauty in the shade—for this prepared
The Duchess to receive you to her bosom,
Her dearest friend; for this have duly fed
The King's ear with your praise, and cleared your way
To rule a sovereign and to share a throne.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

I know thou hast been my architect of power;
And, when the pile is built—

LAUZUN (*with a smile.*)

Could still o'erthrow it,
If thou couldst play the ingrate!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

I!—nay!

LAUZUN.

Hear me!
Each must have need of each. Long live the King!
Still let his temples ache beneath the crown.
But all that kings can give—wealth, rank, and power—
Must be for *us*—the King's friend and his favourite.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

But is it easy to supplant the Duchess?
All love La Vallière! Her meek nature shrinks
Ev'n from our homage; and she wears her state
As if she pray'd the world to pardon greatness.

LAUZUN.

And thus destroys herself! At court, Athenè,
Vice, to win followers, takes the front of virtue,
And looks the dull plebeian things called *moral*
To scorn, until they blush to be unlike her.
Why is De Lauzun not her friend? Why plotting
For a new rival? Why?—Because De Lauzun
Wins not the power he looked for from her friendship!
She keeps not old friends!—and she makes no new ones!
For who would be a friend to one who deems it
A crime to ask his Majesty a favour?
'*Friends*' is a phrase at Court that means *Promotion!*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Her folly, I confess, would not be mine.
But, grant her faults—the King still loves the Duchess!

LAUZUN.

Since none are by, I'll venture on a treason,
And say, the King's a man! — and men will change!
I have his ear, and you shall win his eye.
'Gainst a new face, and an experienced courtier,
What chance hath this poor, loving, simple woman?
Besides, she has too much conscience for a king!
He likes not to look up, and feel how low,
Ev'n on the throne that overlooks the world,
His royal greatness dwarfs beside that heart
That never stooped to sin, save when it loved him!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

You're eloquent, my Lord!

LAUZUN.

Ah! of such natures
You and I know but little!—(*Aside.*) This must cease,
Or I shall all disclose my real aïms!
(*Aloud.*) The King is with the Duchess?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Yes!

LAUZUN.

As yet
She doth suspect you not?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Suspect!—the puppet!
No; but full oft, her head upon my bosom,
Calls me her truest friend!—invites me ever
To amuse the King with my enlivening sallies,—
And still breaks off, in sighing o'er the past,
To wish her spirit were as blithe as mine,
And fears her Louis wearies of her sadness!

LAUZUN.

So, the plot ripens!—ere the King came hither,
I had prepared his royal pride to chafe
At that sad face, whose honest sorrow wears
Reproach unconsciously! You'll learn the issue!
Now, then, farewell!—we understand each other!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

And once I loved this man!—and still might love him,
But that I love ambition! Yes, my steps
Now need a guide; but once upon the height,
And I will have no partner! Thou, lord Duke,
With all thine insolent air of proud protection,
Thou shalt wait trembling on my nod, and bind
Thy fortune to my wheels! O man!—vain man!
Well sung the poet,—when this power of beauty

Heaven gave our sex, it gave the only sceptre
Which makes the world a slave! And I will
wield it!

[*Exit Madame de Montespan.*

SCENE II.

The Scene opens and discovers the King and the Duchess de la Vallière at chess.

LOUIS.

But one move more!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Not so! I check the king!

LOUIS.

A vain attempt!—the king is too well guarded!
There,—check again! Your game is lost!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

As usual,
Ev'n from this mimic stage of war you rise
Ever the victor.

(*They leave the table and advance.*)

LOUIS.

'Twere a fairer fortune,
My own Louise, to reconcile the vanquished!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*sadly.*)

My best-loved Louis!

LOUIS.

Why so sad a tone?
Nay, smile, Louise!—love thinks himself aggrieved
If care cast shadows o'er the heart it seeks
To fill with cloudless sunshine! Smile, Louise!
Ev'n unkind words were kinder than sad looks.
There—*now* thou glad'st me!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yet ev'n thou, methought,
Did'st wear, this morn, a brow on which the light
Shone less serenely than its wont!

LOUIS.

This morn!
Ay, it is true!—this morn I heard that France
Hath lost a subject monarchs well might mourn!
Oh! little know the world how much a king,
Whose life is past in *purchasing* devotion,
Loses in one who merited all favour
And scorned to ask the least! A king, Louise,
Sees but the lackeys of mankind. The true
Lords of our race—the high chivalric hearts—

Nature's nobility—alas! are proud,
And stand aloof, lest slaves should say they flatter!
Of such a mould was he whom France deplores.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Tell me his name, that I, with thee, may mourn him.

LOUIS.

A noble name, but a more noble bearer;
Not to be made by, but to make, a lineage.
Once, too, at Dunkirk, 'twixt me and the foe,
He thrust his gallant breast, already seared
With warrior-wounds, and *his* blood flowed for mine.
Dead!—his just merits all unrecompensed!—
Obscured, like sun-light, by the suppliant clouds!
He should have died a marshal! Death did wrong
To strike so soon! Alas, brave Bragelone!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ha!—did I hear aright, my Liege—my Louis?
That name—that name!—thou saidst not 'Bragelone?'

LOUIS.

Such was his name, not often heard at court.
Thou didst not know him? What! thou art pale! thou weepest!—
Thou art ill! Louise, look up!

[*He leads her to a seat.*

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Be still, O Conscience!
I did not slay him!—Died *too soon!* Alas!
He should have died with all his hopes unblighted,
Ere I was—what I am!

LOUIS.

What mean these words?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

How did death strike him?—what disease?

LOUIS.

I know not.
He had retired from service; and in peace
Breathed out his soul to some remoter sky!
France only guards his fame! What was he to thee
That thou shouldst weep for him?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Hast thou ne'er heard
We were betrothed in youth?

LOUIS (*agitated and aside.*)

Lauzun speaks truth!
I'd not her virgin heart—she lov'd another!
(*Aloud.*) Betrothed! You mourn him deeply!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire, I do
That broken heart!—I was its dream—its idol!
And with regret is mingled—what repentance!

LOUIS (*coldly.*)

Repentance, Madam! Well, the word is gracious!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Pardon! oh, pardon! But the blow was sudden;
How can the heart play courtier with remorse?

LOUIS.

Remorse!—again. Why be at once all honest,
And say you love me not!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Not love you, Louis?

LOUIS.

Not if you feel repentance to have loved!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

What! think'st thou, Louis, I should love thee more
Did I love virtue less, or less regret it?

LOUIS.

I pray you truce with these heroic speeches;
They please us in romance—in life they weary.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Louis, do I deserve this?

LOUIS.

Rather, Lady,
Do *I* deserve the mute reproach of sorrow?
Still less these constant, never-soothed complaints—
This waiting-woman jargon of '*lost virtue.*'

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire, this from you?

LOUIS.

Why, oft—could others hear thee—
Well might they deem thee some poor village Phœbe,
Whom her false Lubin had deceived, and left,
Robb'd of her only dower! and not the great
Duchess la Vallière, in our realm of France
Second to none but our anointed race;
The envy of the beauty and the birth
Of Europe's court—our city of the world!
Is it so great disgrace, Louise la Vallière,
To wear, unrivalled, in thy breast, the heart
Of Bourbon's latest, nor her least, of Kings.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire, when you deigned to love me, I had hoped
You knew the sunshine of your royal favour

Had fallen on a lowly flower. Let others
Deem that the splendor consecrates the sin!
I'd loved thee with as pure and proud a love,
If thou hadst been the poorest cavalier
That ever served a King—thou know'st it, Louis!

LOUIS.

I would not have it so! my fame, my glory,
The purple and the orb, are part of me;
And thou shouldst love them for my sake, and feel
I were not Louis were I less the King.
Still weeping! Fie! I tell thee tears freeze back
The very love I still would bear to thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Would '*still!*'—didst thou say '*still?*'

LOUIS.

Come, lady!
Woman, to keep her empire o'er the heart,
Must learn its nature—mould unto its bias—
And rule, by never differing from our humours.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I'll school my features, teach my lips to smile,
Be all thou wilt; but say not '*still,*' dear Louis

LOUIS.

Well, well! no further words; let peace be with us.

(*Aside.*)

By Heaven, she weeps with yet intenser passion!
It must be that she loved this Bragelone,
And mourns the loftier fate that made her mine!

(*Aloud.*)

This gallant soldier, Madam, your betrothed,
Hath some share in your tears?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Oh, name him not;
My tears are all unworthy dews to fall
Upon a tomb so honoured!

LOUIS.

Grant me patience!
These scenes are very tedious, fair La Vallière.
In truth, we kings have, in the council chamber,
Enough to make us tearful;—in the bower
We would have livelier subjects to divert us.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Again forgive me! I am sick at heart;
I pray you pardon;—these sad news have marred
The music of your presence, and have made me
Fit but for solitude. I pray you, Sire,
Let me retire; and when again I greet you,
I'll wear the mien you'd have me!

LOUIS.

Be it so!
Let me no more disturb you from your thoughts,
They must be sad. So brave—and your betrothed!
Your grief becomes you.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You forgive me, Louis?
We do not part unkindly?

LOUIS.

Fair one, no!

[*Exit La Vallière.*

LOUIS.

She was my first love, and my fondest.—*Was!*
Alas, the word must come!—I love her yet,
But love wanes glimmering to that twilight—friendship!
Grant that she never loved this Bragelone;
Still, tears and sighs make up dull interludes
In passion's short-lived drama! She is good,
Gentle, and meek,—and I do think she loves me,
(A truth no King is sure of!)—But, in fine,
I have begun to feel the hours are long
Pass'd in her presence; what I hotly sough
Coldly I weary of. I'll seek De Lauzun:
I like his wit—I almost like his knavery;

It never makes us yawn, like high-flown virtues.
Thirst, hunger, rest—these are the wants of peasants:
A courtier's wants are titles, place, and gold;
But a poor king, who has these wants so sated,
Has only one want left—to be amused!

[*Exit Louis.*

SCENE III.

Re-enter the Duchess de la Vallière.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Louis! dear Louis!—Gone! alas!—and left me
Half in displeasure!—I was wrong, methinks,
To—no!—I was not wrong to *feel* remorse,
But wrong to give it utterance!

Enter Madame de Montespan.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

What! alone,
Fair friend? I thought the King——

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Has gone, in anger;
Cold, and in anger.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

What, with *thee*, dear Lady?
On the smooth surface of that angel meekness
I should have thought no angry breath could linger.
But men and kings are——

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Hush! I was to blame.
The King's all goodness. Shall I write to him?
Letters have not our looks—and, oh, one look!
How many hardest hearts one look hath won
A life consumed in words had wooed in vain!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

To-night there is high revel at the court;
There you may meet your truant King.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

To-night!
An age!—How many hours to night?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

You know
My office makes my home the royal palace;
I serve the Queen, and thus shall see your Louis
Ere the sun set.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE

You!—happy *you!*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Perchance,
(The King is ever gracious to your friends,
And knows me of the nearest,) I might whisper,
Though with less sweet a tone, your message to him,
And be your dove, and bear you back the olive?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My kind Athenè!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Nay, 'tis yours the kindness,
To wear my love so near your heart. But, tell me,
Since you accept my heraldry, the cause
Of strife between you in this court of Love.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Alas! I know not—save that I offended!
The wherefore boots the heart that loves to know?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Not much, I own, the poor defendant—woman,
But much the advocate; I need the brief.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Methinks his kingly nature chafes to see
It cannot rule the conscience as the heart;

But, tell him, ever henceforth I will keep
Sad thoughts for lonely hours.—Athenè, tell him,
That if he smile once more upon Louise,
The smile shall never pass from that it shines on;
Say—but I'll write myself.

(Sits down to the table and writes.)

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*aside.*)

What need of schemes—
Lauzun's keen wit—Athenè's plotting spirit?
She weaves herself the web that shall ensnare her!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

There; back these feeble words with all thy beauty,
Thy conquering eyes, and thy bewitching smile.
Sure never suit can fail with such a pleader!
And now a little while to holier sadness,
And thine accusing memory, Bragelone!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Whom speak you of?—the hero of the Fronde?
Who seemed the last of the old Norman race,
And half preserved to this degenerate age
The lordly shape the ancient Bayards wore!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You praise him well! He was my father's friend;
And should have been his son. We were affianced,

And—but no more! Ah! cruel, cruel Louis!
You mourned for him—how much more cause have *I!*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*quickly.*)

What! he is dead? your grief the king resented?
Knew he your troth had thus been plighted?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yes;
And still he seemed to deem it sin to mourn him!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*aside.*)

A clue—another clue—that I will follow,
Until it lead me to the throne! (*Aloud.*) Well, cheer thee;
Trust your true friend; rely on my persuasion.
Methinks I never tasked its powers till now.
Farewell, and fear not! Oh! I'll plead your cause,
As if myself the client! (*Aside.*) Thou art sentenced!

[*Exit Madame de Montespan.*

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

'Tis a sweet solace still to have a friend—
A friend in *woman!* Oh, to what a reed
We bind our destinies, when man we love!
Peace, honour, conscience lost—if I lose him,
What have I left? How sinks my heart within me!

I'll to my chamber; there the day of tears
Learns night to smile!—*And I'm the thing they envy!**

[*Exit Duchess de la Vallière.*

SCENE IV.

The Gardens of Versailles — Lauzun, Grammont, and Courtiers.

LAUZUN.

'Tis now the hour in which our royal master
Honours the ground of his rejoicing gardens
By his illustrious footsteps!—there, my lords,
That is the true style-courtier!

* In representation, the actress who may perform the Duchess de la Vallière will pardon me for observing, that the words in italics should be said, not *ironically*, but with a kind of sad and patient wonder. She should appear lost in amazed abstraction at the contrast between her real feelings and the envy she excites, and wake from it with a slight start and smile. And, in one word, now that I am on that subject, the actress should remember that the very soul of La Vallière's character is simplicity; and that there are few passages in which the *natural* tone of voice will not be more suitable and more effective than the declamatory.

GRAMMONT.

Out upon you!
Your phrase would suit some little German prince,
Of fifteen hundred quarterings and five acres,
And not the world's great Louis! 'Tis the hour
When Phœbus shrinks abashed, and all the stars
Envy the day that it beholds the King!

(*To them, Marquis de Montespan, in bright scarlet hose.*)

MARQUIS DE MONTESPAN.

Most beautiful! You have a turn of thought,
A taste, a sentiment, so chaste and noble!
Oh, I am charmed—enraptured!

LAUZUN.

You here, Marquis!
Why, you make Grammont blush. Such praise from you
Will turn his bashful brain! Dear Montespan,
You are the glass of fashion! Heavens, what stockings!
The exquisite man!

MONTESPAN.

I'faith, methinks they're pretty.

LAUZUN.

Pretty !—if I were married, 'troth, my Duchess
Should keep her train at a respectful distance ;
You'd set it on a blaze ! You walk the earth
Like Cupid mounted on a pair of flambeaux !
Oh, you're a dangerous man !

MONTESPAN.

So says my wife,
And begs me not to come too near her—lest
She love me too outrageously ! At courts,
People of quality must be decorous ;
'Tis not the mode to seem adored too much.

LAUZUN.

Your wife's an angel ! *Apropos*, dear Marquis ;
You see a friend's advice was worth the taking ;
Your lady's all the rage ;—the King admires her.

MONTESPAN.

The King !—I'm in despair—I mean, dear Duke,
I am enraptured !—hum !—

LAUZUN.

You are not jealous ?

MONTESPAN.

Zounds !—jealous !—no !

LAUZUN.

No Marquis can be jealous!

MONTESPAN.

Not of a count or baron; but a king!
S'death, if I thought it—were my honour touched,
An' it were fifty kings—

Enter Louis.

LOUIS.

Good day, my Lords!
Pray you be covered. Well!—what says the Marquis
Of fifty kings?

MONTESPAN.

I—*I*—I'm in despair!

LAUZUN.

That fifty kings would never make one Louis!

LOUIS.

Go to, thou flatterer! Harkye, dear De Lauzun.

[*Exeunt the Courtiers, as the King takes Lauzun aside.*

MONTESPAN (*aside.*)

My wife said right; this worthy duke has got
The true court politesse!—He lies divinely!
[*Exit Montespan.*

LAUZUN.

This Montespan I own is wondrous silly;
But he has one good quality—his wife!

LOUIS.

That's true!—a charming face!

LAUZUN.

Ah! had she heard you,
Your Majesty had made one blissful subject.

LOUIS.

Nay, Lauzun, nay!

LAUZUN.

Her soul is like the Persian,
And on the loftiest eminence hath built
A shrine of fire. But, pardon me, my Liege;
I had forgot, your royal taste prefers
Natures that love less warmly—though as well.

LOUIS.

Hem!—But, in truth, this lady's worth the loving;
And, by mine honour, while we speak, she comes!
A happy fortune.

Enter Madame de Montespan.

LAUZUN (*archly.*)

Sire, may I withdraw?

LOUIS.

Some message from the Queen; why—as thou wilt.

LAUZUN (*aside.*)

Methinks it may be as I *will!*

[*Exit Lauzun.*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

(*Appearing for the first time to perceive Louis.*)

The King!

(*Salutes him, and passes on.*)

LOUIS.

Fair Madam, we had hoped you with you brought
Some bright excuse to grace our cheerless presence
With a less short-lived light! You dawn upon us
Only to make us more regret your setting.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Sire, if I dared, I would most gladly hail
A few short moments to arrest your presence,
And rid me of a soft, yet painful duty.

LOUIS.

'Tis the first time, be sure, so sweet a voice
E'er crav'd a sanction for delighting silence.
Speak on, we pray thee!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Gracious Sire, the Duchess,
Whom you have lately left, she fears, in anger,
Besought me to present this letter to you.

LOUIS (*takes the letter, and aside.*)

She blushes while she speaks!—'Tis passing strange,
I ne'er remarked those darkly-dreaming eyes,
That melt in their own light!
(*Reads, and carelessly puts up the letter.*)
It scarcely suits
Her dignity, and ours, to choose a witness
To what hath chanced between us. She is good;
But her youth, spent in some old country castle,
Knows not the delicate spirit of a court.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

She bade me back her suit. Alas! my Liege,
Who can succeed, if fair La Vallière fail?

LOUIS.

She bade thee?—she was prudent! Were *I* woman,
And loved, I'd not have chosen such a herald.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Love varies in its colours with all tempers;
The Duchess is too proud to fear a rival,
Too beautiful to find one. May I take
Some word of comfort back to cheer her sadness?
Made doubly deep by thoughts of your displeasure,
And grief for a dear friend.

LOUIS.

Aye, *that's* the sadness!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

He was a gallant lord, this Bragelone,
And her betrothed. Perchance in youth she loved him,
Ere the great sun had quenched the morning star!

LOUIS.

She loved him!—think'st thou so?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Indeed I know not;
But I have heard her eloquent in praise,
And seen her lost in woe. You will forgive her!

LOUIS.

Forgive her?—there's no cause!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Now, bless you, Sire,
For that one word. My task is done.

LOUIS.

Already?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

What can I more? Oh, let me hasten back!
What rapture must be hers who can but fill
An atom of the heart of godlike Louis!
How much more the whole soul!—To lose thy love
Must be, not grief, but some sublime despair
Like that the Roman felt who lost a world!

LOUIS.

By Heaven, she fires me!—a brave, royal spirit,
Worthy to love a king!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

To know thee hers,
What pride!—what glory! Though all earth cried
'Shame!'
Earth could not still the trumpet at her heart,
That, with its swelling and exultant voice,
Told her the earth was but the slave of Louis,
And *she* the partner! And, O hour of dread!

When (for the hour must come) some fairer form
Shall win thee from her — still, methinks, 'twould be
A boast to far posterity to point
To all the trophies piled about thy throne,
And say—'He loved me once!'—O Sire, your pardon;
I am too bold.

LOUIS.

Why, this were love, indeed,
Could we but hope to win it. And such love
Would weave the laurel in its wreaths of myrtle.
Beautiful lady! while thou speak'st, I dream
What love should be,—and feel where love is not!
Thou com'st the suitor, to remain the judge;
And I could kneel to thee for hope and mercy.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Ah, no!—ah, no!—she is my friend. And if
She love not as I love—I mean, I *might* love—
Still she *believes* she loves thee. Tempt me not.
Who could resist thee! Sire, farewell!

[*Exit Madame de Montespan.*

LOUIS.

Her voice
Is hush'd; but still its queen-like music lingers
In my rapt ears. I dreamt Louise had loved me;

She who felt love disgrace! Before the true,
How the tame counterfeit grows pale and lifeless.
By the sad brow of yon devout La Vallière
I feel a man, and fear myself a culprit!
But this high spirit wakes in mine the sense
Of what it is—I *am* that Louis whom
The world has called 'The Great!'—and in her pride
Mirror mine own. This jaded life assumes
The zest, the youth, the glory of *excitement!*
To-night we meet again;—speed fast, dull hours!

[*Exit Louis.*

SCENE V.

Grand Saloon in the Palace of Versailles; in the back ground the suite of Apartments is seen in perspective—the Queen seated to the left of the stage; some of the Ladies of the blood royal seated also, but on stools—many Ladies standing round.

Several Ladies enter, one by one salute the Queen, and pass on to the front of the stage—the Queen half rises to each, and appears to address them in passing, but in dumb show.

FIRST LADY.

How graciously the Queen receives the Guiches!

SECOND LADY.

See, fair La Tremouille's again in favour!

THIRD LADY.

Hush! Lo, the star that rarely gilds the nights
Of the court-heaven—the beautiful La Vallière!

Enter the Duchess de la Vallière—salutes the Queen, who half turns her back upon her in silence.

FIRST LADY.

Saw you the Queen's marked rudeness?

SECOND LADY.

Tush! the Queen
Is but a cypher! 'tis the King alone
Whose smile makes up the sum of royal favour.

THIRD LADY.

You're right; and while that smile is still La Vallière's,
She is the real Queen. How say you, Ladies?
Shall we not pay our court to her?

(*The Ladies crowd round the Duchess, and appear to render her the most reverential homage, which she receives with humility and embarrassment.*)

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

These smiles
Cannot efface that injured woman's frown.
Oh, how the heart that wrong'd avenges her!

Enter Lauzun, Marquis de Montespan, and several Courtiers, who, after saluting the Queen, surround the Duchess de la Vallière with still greater homage.

FIRST COURTIER.

(*Approaching the Duchess de la Vallière.*)

Madam, your goodness is to France a proverb!
If I might dare request, this slight memorial
You would convey to our most gracious Master?

The rank of colonel in the royal guard
Is just now vacant. True, I have not served;
But I do trust my valour is well known:
I've killed three noted swordsmen in a duel!—
And, for the rest, a word from you were more
Than all the laurels Holland gave to others.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My Lord, forgive me! I might ill deserve
The friendship of a monarch, if, forgetting
That honours are the attributes of merit;—
And they who sell the service of the public
For the false coin, soft smiles and honeyed words,
Forge in the antechambers of a palace,
Defraud a people to degrade a king!
If you have merits, let *them* plead for you;
Nor ask in whispers what you claim from justice.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*to first Courtier, as the Duchess de la Vallière turns away.*)

Give me the paper. Hush! the King shall see it.

Music.

Enter the King, Grammont, and other Courtiers. He pauses by the Queen, and accosts her respectfully in dumb show.

GRAMMONT (*aside.*)

With what a stately and sublime decorum
His Majesty throws grandeur o'er his foibles!

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He not disguises vice; but makes vice kingly—
Most gorgeous of all sensualists!

LAUZUN.

How different
His royal rival in the chase of pleasure,
The spendthrift, sauntering, Second Charles of England!

GRAMMONT.

Ay, Jove to Comus!

LAUZUN.

Silence! Jove approaches!

(*The Queen rises, the crowd breaks up into groups; the King passes slowly from each till he joins the Duchess de la Vallière; the Courtiers retire.*)

LOUIS.

Why, this is well. I thank you.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And forgive me?

LOUIS.

Forgive you! You mistake me; wounded feeling
Is not displeasure. Let this pass, Louise.
Your lovely friend has a most heavenly smile!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And a warm heart. In truth, my Liege, I'm glad
You see her with my eyes.

LOUIS.

You have no friend
Whose face it glads me more to look upon.
(*Aside, and gazing on Montespan.*)
(What thrilling eyes!)—(*Aloud.*) My thanks are due to her,
For, with the oil of her mellifluous voice,
Smoothing the waves the passing breeze had ruffled.
(*Joins Madame de Montespan, and leads her through the crowd to the back of the stage.*)

LAUZUN (*to Marquis de Montespan.*)

Ar'n't you enraptured, Marquis?

MONTESPAN.

Hum!

LAUZUN.

The King
Is very condescending to your lady!

MONTESPAN.

Oh, mighty condescending! How he eyes her!

LAUZUN.

'Tis all for love of you.

MONTESPAN.

I shall despair
If the King mean me shame!

LAUZUN.

He means you honour.
O what a great man you will be, dear Marquis.
Do not forget your friends!

MONTESPAN.

Why, as you say,
'Tis very flattering—and, on second thoughts,
I clearly see I ought to be enraptured!

(*Lauzun leaves Montespan, who mingles with the crowd, and should keep out of sight for the rest of the scene, and joins the Duchess de la Vallière.*)

LAUZUN.

Your Grace resolves no more to be content
Eclipsing others. You eclipse yourself.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I thought you were a friend, and not a flatterer.

LAUZUN.

Friendship would lose its dearest privilege
If friendship were forbidden to admire!
Why, ev'n the King admires your Grace's friend,—
Told me to-day she was the loveliest lady

The court could boast. Nay, see how, while they
speak,
He gazes on her. How his breathing fans
The locks that shade the roses of her cheek!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ha! Nay, be still, my heart.

LAUZUN.

It is but friendship;
But it looks wondrous warm!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He cannot mean it!
And yet—and yet—he lingers on her hand—
He whispers!

LAUZUN.

How the gossips gaze and smile!
There'll be much scandal.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Lauzun!—what!—thou thinks't not?
No, no, thou canst not think—

LAUZUN.

That courts know treachery,
That women are ambitious, or men false;
I will not think it. Pshaw!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My brain swims round!
Louis, of late, hath been so changed. How fair
She looks to-night!—and, oh, *she* has not fallen!
He comes—he nears us—he has left her. Fie!
My foolish fancies wronged him!

LAUZUN.

The spell works.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

(*As the King quits her, to first Courtier, giving him back the paper.*)
My Lord, your suit is granted.

FIRST COURTIER.

Blessings, Madam!
(*The other Courtiers come round him.*)

SECOND COURTIER.

Her influence must be great. I know three dukes
Most pressing for the post.

THIRD COURTIER.

A rising sun,
Worthier of worship than that cold La Vallière.
The King as well, methinks, might have no mistress,
As one by whom no courtier grew the richer.
(*The Courtiers group round Madame de Montespan.*)

LOUIS.

My Lords, you do remember the bright lists
Which, in the place termed thenceforth '*The Carrousel,*'*
We some time held?—a knightly tournament,
That brought us back the age of the first Francis!

LAUZUN.

Of all your glorious festivals, the greatest!
Who but remembers?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

Then he wore my colours.
How kind to bring back to my yearning heart
That golden spring-time of our early loves!

LOUIS.

Next week we will revive the heroic pageant.
Proud plumes shall wave, and levelled spears be shivered;
Ourself will take the lists, and do defy
The chivalry of our renowned France,
In honour of that lady of our court
For whom we wear the colours, and the motto
Which suits her best—'*Most bright where all are brilliant!*'

* The *Place du Carrousel* was so named from a splendid festival given by Louis. On the second day, devoted to knightly games, the King, who appeared in the character of *Roger*, carried off four prizes. All the crown jewels were prodigalized on his arms and the trappings of his horse.

GRAMMONT.

Oh, a most kingly notion!

LOUIS.

Ere we part,
Let each knight choose his colours and his lady.
Ourself have set the example.

(*The Courtiers mingle with the Ladies, &c.; many Ladies give their colours.*)

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*timidly.*)

Oh, my Louis!
I read thy heart; thou hast chosen this device
To learn thy poor La Vallière to be proud.
Nay, turn not from my blessings. Once before
You wore my colours, though I gave them not.
To-night I give them!—Louis loves me still!

(*Takes one of the knots from her breast, and presents it.*)

LOUIS.

Lady, the noblest hearts in France would beat
More high beneath your badge. Alas! *my* service
Is vowed already *here.*

(*Turning to Madame de Montespan, and placing a knot of her colours over his order of the Saint Esprit.*)

These are my colours!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

How! How!

(*The King converses apart with Madame de Montespan.*)

LAUZUN (*to the Duchess de la Vallière.*)

Be calm, your Grace; a thousand eyes
Are on you. Give the envious crowd no triumph.
Ah! had *my* fortune won so soft a heart
I would have——

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Peace!—Away! Betrayed—Undone!

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The Gardens at Versailles.

Enter Lauzun.

LAUZUN.

So far, so prosperous! From the breast of Louis,
The blooming love it bore so long a summer,
Falls like a fruit o'er-ripe; and, in the court,
And o'er the King, this glittering Montespan
Queens it without a rival,—awes all foes,
And therefore makes all friends. State, office, honours,
Reflect her smile, or fade before her frown.
So far, so well! Enough for Montespan.
For Lauzun now!—I love this fair La Vallière,
As well, at least, as woman's worth the loving;

And if the jewel has one trifling flaw,
The gold 'tis set in will redeem the blemish.
The King's no niggard lover; and her wealth
Is vast. I have the total in my tablets—
(Besides estates in Picardy and Provence.)
I'm very poor—my debtors very pressing.
I've robbed the Duchess of a faithless lover,
To give myself a wife, and her a husband.
Wedlock's a holy thing,—and wealth a good one!

Enter Marquis de Montespan.

MONTESPAN.

O Duke, behold a miserable man!

LAUZUN.

What! in despair?

MONTESPAN.

Despair, sir!—that's a thing
That happens every hour! But this——

LAUZUN.

Take breath.
What is the matter?

MONTESPAN.

Banished from the court!

LAUZUN.

Banished? For what offence?

MONTESPAN.

Because the King
Complains my wife's an angel! and declares
Her health will be affected by my temper.
My temper!—I'm a lamb!

LAUZUN.

Perhaps the King
Is jealous of you?

MONTESPAN.

On my life, you've hit it!
And yet, I never gave him any cause!

Enter Louis.

LOUIS (*to Marquis de Montespan.*)

You, my Lord, in the precincts of our palace!—
This is too daring.

MONTESPAN.

Oh, your Majesty,
I do beseech your grace. I am most sorry
To have a wife so good. 'Tis not my fault, Sire.

LOUIS.

Silence, my Lord! Your strange and countless
follies—
The scenes you make—your loud domestic broils—
Bring scandal on our court. Decorum needs
Your banishment; or, since you cannot live
With your fair lady in harmonious concord,
Leave her in peace, and live alone!

MONTESPAN.

Alas!
There *is* no broil.

LAUZUN (*aside.*)

What, contradict the King!

MONTESPAN.

My wife and I are doves!

LOUIS.

You *must* perceive
That it were best for both to break a chain
You both abhor.

MONTESPAN.

I swear——

LOUIS.

Peace, Marquis! Go!
And for your separate household, which entails

A double cost, our treasurer shall accord you
A hundred thousand crowns.

MONTESPAN.

O generous Monarch!

LOUIS.

Mind, your poor lady, from this hour, is free.
No more. Your exile is revoked. Good day, sir!

MONTESPAN.

A hundred thousand crowns!

LAUZUN.

Begone!

MONTESPAN.

With rapture!

[*Exit Marquis de Montespan.*

LOUIS.

A fool, well rid of. Strange that such a dolt
Should e'er be mated with the bright Athenè.
Pleasure is never stagnant in her presence;
But every breeze of woman's changeful skies
Ripples the stream, and freshens e'en the sunshine.

LAUZUN.

'Tis said, your Majesty, 'that contrast's sweet,'
And she you speak of well contrasts another,
Whom once——

LOUIS.

I loved; and still devoutly honour.
This poor La Vallière!—could we will affection,
I would have never changed. And even now
I feel Athenè has but charmed my senses,
And my void heart still murmurs for Louise!
I would we could be friends, since now not lovers,
Nor dare be happy while I know her wretched.

LAUZUN.

Wearies she still your Majesty with prayers,
Tender laments, and passionate reproaches?

LOUIS.

Her love outlives its hopes.

LAUZUN.

An irksome task
To witness tears we cannot kiss away,
And with cold friendship freeze the ears of love!

LOUIS.

Most irksome and most bootless!

LAUZUN.

Haply, Sire,
In one so pure, the charm of wedded life
Might lull keen griefs to rest, and curb the love
Thou fli'st from to the friendship that thou seekest?

LOUIS.

I've thought of this. The Duke de Longueville loves her,
And hath besought before her feet to lay
His princely fortunes.

LAUZUN (*quickly.*)

Ha!—and she——

LOUIS.

Rejects him.

LAUZUN.

Sire, if love's sun, once set, bequeaths a twilight,
'Twould only hover o'er some form whom chance
Had linked with Louis—some one (though unworthy)
Whose presence took a charm from brighter thoughts
That knit it with the past.

LOUIS.

Why, how now, Duke!—
Thou speak'st not of thyself?

LAUZUN.

I dare not, Sire!

LOUIS.

Ha! ha!—poor Lauzun!—what! the soft La Vallière
Transfer her sorrowing heart to thee! Ha! ha!.

LAUZUN.

My name is not less noble than De Longueville's;
My glory greater, since the world has said
Louis esteems me more.

LOUIS.

Esteems! No!—*favours!*
And thou dost think that she, who shrunk from love,
Lest love were vice, would wed the wildest Lord
That ever laughed at virtue?

LAUZUN.

Sire, you wrong me,
Or else you (pardon me) condemn yourself.
Is it too much for one the King calls friend
To aspire to one the King has call'd——

LOUIS.

Sir, hold!
I never so malign'd that hapless Lady

As to give *her* the title only due
To such as Montespan, who glories in it—
The *last* my *mistress;* but the first my *victim:*
A nice distinction, taught not in your logic,
Which, but just now, confused esteem and favour.
Go to! we kings are not the dupes you deem us.

LAUZUN (*aside.*)

So high! I'll win La Vallière to avenge me,
And humble this imperial vanity.

(*Aloud.*)

Sire, I offend! Permit me to retire,
And mourn your anger; nor presume to guess
Whence came the cause. And, since it seems your *favour*
Made me aspire too high, in that I loved
Where you, Sire, made love noble, and half-dreamed
Might be—nay, *am* not—wholly there disdained—

LOUIS.

How, Duke!

LAUZUN.

I do renounce at once
The haughty vision. Sire, permit my absence.

LOUIS.

Lauzun, thou hintest that, were suit allowed thee,
La Vallière might not scorn it;—is it so?

LAUZUN.

I crave your pardon, Sire.

LOUIS.

Must I ask twice?

LAUZUN.

I do believe, then, Sire, with time and patience;
The Duchess might be won to—*not reject me!*

LOUIS.

Go, then, and prove thy fortune. We permit thee.
And, if thou prosperest, why then love's a riddle,
And woman is—no matter! Go, my Lord;
We did not mean to wound thee. So, forget it!
Woo when thou wilt—and wear what thou canst win.

LAUZUN.

My gracious Liege, Lauzun commends him to thee;
And if one word, he merit not, may wound him,
He'll think of favours words can never cancel.
Memory shall med'cine to his present pain.
God save you, Sire!— (*Aside*) to *be* the dupe I deem you!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

LOUIS.

I love her not; and yet, methinks, am jealous!
Lauzun is wise and witty—knows the sex;
What if she do?—No! I will not believe it.
And what is she to me?—a friend—a friend:
And I would have her wed. 'Twere best for both—
A balm for conscience—an excuse for change!
'Twere best:—I marvel much if she'll accept him!

[*Exit Louis.*

SCENE II.

A private Apartment in the Palace of the Duchess de la Vallière.

Enter the Duchess de la Vallière.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He loves me, then, no longer! All the words
Earth knows shape but one thought—'He loves no longer!'
Where shall I turn? My mother—my poor mother!
Sleeps the long sleep! Tis better so! Her life
Ran to its lees. I will not mourn for her.

But it is hard to be alone on earth!
This love, for which I gave so much, is dead,
Save in my heart; and love, surviving love,
Changes its nature, and becomes despair!
Ah, me!—ah, me! how hateful is this world!

Enter Gentleman of the Chamber.

GENTLEMAN.

The Duke de Lauzun!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

News, sweet news, of Louis!

Enter Lauzun.

LAUZUN.

Dare I disturb your thoughts?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My Lord, you're welcome!
Came you from court to-day?

LAUZUN.

I left the King
But just now, in the gardens.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*eagerly.*)

Well!

LAUZUN.

He bore him
With his accustomed health!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Proceed.

LAUZUN.

Dear Lady,
I have no more to tell.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

Alas! *No message!*

LAUZUN.

We did converse, 'tis true, upon a subject
Most dear to one of us. Your Grace divines it?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*joyfully.*)

Was it of *me* he spoke?

LAUZUN.

Of you
I spoke, and *he* replied. I praised your beauty—

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You praised!

LAUZUN.

Your form, your face—that wealth of mind
Which, play'd you not the miser, and concealed it,
Would buy up all the coins that pass for wit.
The King, assenting, wished he might behold you
As happy—as your virtues should have made you.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

'Twas said in mockery!

LAUZUN.

Lady, no!—in kindness.
Nay, more, (he added,) would you yet your will
Mould to his wish—

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

His wish!—the lightest!

LAUZUN.

Ah!
You know not how my heart throbs while you speak!
Be not so rash to promise; or, at least,
Be faithful to perform!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You speak in riddles.

LAUZUN.

Of your lone state and beautiful affections,
Formed to make Home an Eden, our good King,
Tenderly mindful, fain would see you link
Your lot to one whose love might be your shelter.
He spake, and all my long-concealed emotions
Gush'd into words, and I confess'd—O Lady,
Hear me confess once more—how well I love thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

You dared?—and *he*—the King—

LAUZUN.

Upon me smiled,
And bade me prosper.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÉRE.

Ah!

(*Sinks down, and covers her face with her hands.*)

LAUZUN.

Nay, nay, look up!
The heart that could forsake a love like thine
Doth not deserve regret. Look up, dear Lady!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He bade thee prosper!

LAUZUN.

Pardon! My wild hope
Outran discretion.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Louis bade thee prosper!

LAUZUN.

Ah, if this thankless—this remorseless love
Thou couldst forget! Oh, give me but thy friendship,
And take respect, faith, worship, all, in Lauzun!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Consign me to another! Well, 'tis well!
Earth's latest tie is broke! — earth's hopes are over!

LAUZUN.

Speak to me, sweet Louise!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE

So, thou art he
To whom this shattered heart should be surrendered?—

And thou, the high-born, glittering, scornful Lauzun,
Wouldst take the cast-off leman of a King,
Nor think thyself disgraced! Fie!—fie! thou'rt shameless!

LAUZUN.

You were betray'd by love, and not by sin,
Nor low ambition. Your disgrace is honour
By the false side of dames the world calls spotless.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Go, sir, nor make me scorn you. If I've erred,
I know, at least, the majesty of virtue,
And feel—what you forget.

LAUZUN.

Yet hear me, Madam!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Go, go! You are the King's friend—you were mine;
I would not have you thus debased: refused
By one, at once the fallen and forsaken!
His friend shall not be shamed so!

[*Exit the Duchess de la Vallière.*

LAUZUN (*passing his hand over his eyes.*)

I do swear
These eyes are moist! And he who owned this gem
Casts it away, and cries 'divine' to tinsel!
So falls my hope. My fortunes call me back
To surer schemes. Before that ray of goodness
How many plots shrunk, blinded, into shadow!
Lauzun forgot himself, and dreamt of virtue!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

SCENE III.

Gentleman of the Chamber, and Bragelone, as a Franciscan friar.

GENTLEMAN.

The Duchess gone! I fear me that, to-day,
You are too late for audience, reverend father.

BRAGELONE.

Audience!—a royal phrase!—it suits the Duchess.
Go, son; announce me.

GENTLEMAN.

By what name, my father?

BRAGELONE.

I've done with names. Announce a nameless monk,
Whose prayers have risen o'er some graves she honours.

GENTLEMAN (*aside.*)

My lady is too lavish of her bounty
To these proud shavelings: yet, methinks, this friar
Hath less of priest than warrior in his bearing.
He awes me with his stern and thrilling voice,
His stately gesture, and imperious eye.
And yet, I swear, he comes for alms!—the varlet!
Why should I heed him?

BRAGELONE.

Didst thou hear? Begone!
[*Exit Gentleman.*
Yes, she will know me not. My lealest soldier,
One who had march'd, bare-breasted, on the steel,
If I had bid him cast away the treasure
Of the o'er-valued life; the nurse that reared me,
Or mine own mother, in these shroudlike robes,
And in the immature and rapid age

Which, from my numb'd and withering heart, hath crept
Unto my features, now might gaze upon me,
And pass the stranger by. Why should she know me,
If they who lov'd me know not? Hark! I hear her:
That silver footfall!—still it hath to me
Its own peculiar and most spiritual music,
Trembling along the pulses of the air,
And dying on the heart that makes its echo!
'Tis she! How lovely yet!

Enter the Duchess de la Vallière.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Your blessing, father.

BRAGELONE.

Let courts and courtiers bless the favoured Duchess:
Courts bless the proud; God's ministers, the humble.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

He taunts me, this poor friar! Well, my father,
I have obeyed your summons. Do you seek
Masses for souls departed?—or the debt
The wealthy owe the poor?—say on!

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

Her heart
Is not yet hardened! Daughter, such a mission
Were sweeter than the task which urged me hither:
You had a lover once—a plain, bold soldier;
He loved you well!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ah, Heaven!

BRAGELONE.

And you forsook him.
Your choice was natural—some might call it noble!
And this blunt soldier pardoned the *desertion*,
But sunk at what his folly termed *dishonour*.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O, Father, spare me!—if dishonour were,
It rested but with me.

BRAGELONE.

So deemed the world,
But not that foolish soldier!—he had learned
To blend his thoughts, his fame, *himself*, with thee;
Thou wert a purer, a diviner self;
He loved thee as a warrior worships glory;
He loved thee as a Roman honoured virtue;

He loved thee as thy sex adore ambition;
And when Pollution breathed upon his idol,
It blasted glory, virtue, and ambition,
Fill'd up each crevice in the world of thought,
And poisoned earth with thy contagious shame!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Spare me! in mercy, spare me!

BRAGELONE.

This poor fool,
This shadow, living only on thy light,
When thou wert darkened, could but choose to die.
He left the wars;—no fame, since *thine* was dim:
He left his land;—what home without Louise?
It broke—that stubborn, stern, unbending heart—
It broke! and, breaking, its last sigh—forgave thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And I live on!

BRAGELONE.

One eve, methinks, he told me,
Thy hand around his hauberk wound a scarf;
And thy voice bade him 'Wear it for the sake
Of one who honoured worth!' Were those the words?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

They were. Alàs! alas!

BRAGELONE.

He wore it, Lady,
Till memory ceased. It was to him the token
Of a sweet dream; and, from his quiet grave,
He sends it now to thee.—Its hues are faded.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Give it me!—let me bathe it with my tears!
Memorial of my guilt—

BRAGELONE (*in a soft and tender accent.*)

And *his* forgiveness!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

That tone!—ha! while thou speakest, in thy voice,
And in thy presence, there is something kindred
To him we jointly mourn: thou art—

BRAGELONE.

His brother;
Of whom, perchance, in ancient years he told thee;
Who, early wearied of this garish world,
Fled to the convent-shade, and found repose.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*approaching.*)

Ay, is it so?—thou'rt Bragelone's brother?
Why, then, thou art what *he* would be, if living—
A friend to one most friendless!

BRAGELONE.

Friendless!—Ay,
Thou hast learnt, betimes, the truth, that man's wild passion
Makes but its sport of virtue, peace, affection;
And breaks the plaything when the game is done!
Friendless!—I pity thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Oh! holy Father,
Stay with me!—succour me!—reprove, but guide me:
Teach me to wean my thoughts from earth to heaven,
And be what God ordained his chosen priests—
Foes to our sin, but friends to our despair.

BRAGELONE.

Daughter, a heavenly and a welcome duty,
But one most rigid and austere: there is
No composition with our debts of sin.
God claims thy soul; and, lo! his creature there!
Thy choice must be between them—God or man,
Virtue or guilt; a Louis or—

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

A Louis!
Not mine the poor atonement of the choice;
I am, myself, the Abandoned One!

BRAGELONE.

I know it;
Therefore my mission and my ministry.
When he who loved thee died, he bade me wait
The season when the sicklied blight of change
Creeps o'er the bloom of Passion, when the way
Is half prepared by Sorrow to Repentance,
And seek you then,—*he* trusted not in vain:
Perchance an idle hope, but it consoled him.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

No, no!—not idle!—in my happiest hours,
When the world smiled, a void was in this heart
The world could never fill: thy brother knew me!

BRAGELONE.

I do believe thee, daughter. Hear me yet;
My mission is not ended. When thy mother
Lay on the bed of death, (she went before
The sterner heart the same blow broke more slowly,)
As thus she lay, around the swimming walls
Her dim eyes wandered, searching, through the shadows,
As if the spirit, half-redeemed from clay,

Could force its will to shape, and, from the darkness,
Body a daughter's image—(nay, be still!)
Thou wert not there;—alas! thy shame had murdered
Even the blessed sadness of that duty!
But o'er that pillow watched a sleepless eye,
And by that couch moved one untiring step,
And o'er that suffering rose a ceaseless prayer;
And still thy mother's voice, whene'er it called
Upon a daughter—found a son!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O God!
Have mercy on me!

BRAGELONE.

Coldly, through the lattice,
Gleamed the slow dawn, and, from their latest sleep,
Woke the sad eyes it was not *thine* to close!
And, as they fell upon the haggard brow,
And the thin hairs—grown grey, but not by Time—
Of that lone watcher—while upon her heart
Gushed all the memories of the mighty wrecks
Thy guilt had made of what were once the shrines
For Honour, Peace, and God!—that aged woman
(She was a hero's wife) upraised her voice
To curse her child!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Go on!—be kind, and kill me!

BRAGELONE.

Then he, whom thoughts of what he *was* to *thee*
Had made her son, arrested on her lips
The awful doom, and, from the earlier past,
Invoked a tenderer spell—a holier image;
Painted thy gentle, soft, obedient childhood—
Thy guileless youth, lone state, and strong temptation;
Thy very sin the overflow of thoughts
From wells whose source was innocence; and thus
Sought, with the sunshine of thy maiden spring,
To melt the ice that lay upon her heart,
Till all the mother flowed again!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

And she?—

BRAGELONE.

Spoke only once again! She died—and *blest* thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*rushing out.*)

No more!—I *can* no more!—my heart is breaking!

BRAGELONE.

The angel hath not left her!—if the plumes
Have lost the whiteness of their younger glory,
The wings have still the instinct of the skies,
And yet shall bear her up!

LOUIS (*without.*)

We need you not, Sir;
Ourself will seek the Duchess.

BRAGELONE.

The King's voice!
How my flesh creeps!—my foe, and her destroyer!
The ruthless, heartless—

(*His hand seeks, rapidly and mechanically, for his sword-hilt.*)

Why, why!—where's my sword?
O Lord! I do forget myself to dotage:
The soldier, now, is a poor helpless monk,
That hath not even curses! Satan, hence!
Get thee behind me, Tempter!—There, I'm calm.

SCENE IV.

Louis — Bragelone.

LOUIS.

I can no more hold parley with impatience,
But long to learn how Lauzun's courtship prospers.
She is not here. At prayers, perhaps. The Duchess
Hath grown devout. A friar!—Save you, father!

BRAGELONE.

I thank thee, son.

LOUIS.

He knows me not. Well, Monk,
Are you her Grace's almoner?

BRAGELONE.

Sire, no!

LOUIS.

So short, yet know us?

BRAGELONE.

Sire, I do. You are
The man—

LOUIS.

How, priest!—the *man!*

BRAGELONE.

The word offends you?
The King, who raised a maiden to a Duchess.
That maiden's father was a gallant subject:
Kingly reward!—you made his daughter Duchess.
That maiden's mother was a stainless matron:
Her heart you broke, though mother to a Duchess!
That maiden was affianced from her youth
To one who served you well—nay, saved your life:

His life you robbed of all that gave life value;
And yet—you made his fair betrothed a Duchess!
You are that King. The world proclaims you
'Great;'
A million warriors bled to buy your laurels;
A million peasants starved to build Versailles:
Your people famish; but your court is splendid!
Priests from their pulpits bless your glorious reign;
Poets have sung the greater than Augustus;
And painters placed you on immortal canvass,
Limn'd as the Jove whose thunders awe the world:
But to the humble minister of God,
You are the King who has betrayed his trust—
Beggared a nation but to bloat a court,
Seen in men's lives the pastime to ambition,
Looked but on virtue as the toy for vice;
And, for the first time, from a subject's lips,
Now learns the name he leaves to Time and God!

LOUIS.

Add to the bead-roll of that King's offences
That, when a foul-mouthed Monk assumed the rebel,
The Monster-King forgave him. Hast thou done?

BRAGELONE.

Your changing hues belie your royal mien;
Ill the high monarch veils the trembling man!

LOUIS.

Well, you are privileged! It ne'er was said
The Fourteenth Louis, in his proudest hour,
Bow'd not his sceptre to the Church's crozier.

BRAGELONE.

Alas! *the Church*! 'Tis true, this garb of serge
Dares speech that daunts the ermine, and walks free
Where stout hearts tremble in the triple mail.
But wherefore?—Lies the virtue in the robe,
Which the moth eats? or in these senseless beads?
Or in the name of Priest? The Pharisees
Had priests that gave their Saviour to the cross!
No! we have high immunity and sanction,
That Truth may teach humanity to Power,
Glide through the dungeon, pierce the armed throng,
Awaken Luxury on her Sybarite couch,
And, startling souls that slumber on a throne,
Bow kings before that priest of priests—THE CONSCIENCE!

LOUIS (*aside.*)

An awful man!—unlike the reverend crew
Who praise my royal virtues in the pulpit,
And—ask for bishoprics when church is over!

BRAGELONE.

This makes us sacred. The profane are they
Honouring the herald while they scorn the mission.
The king who serves the church, yet clings to mammon,
Who fears the pastor, but forgets the flock,
Who bows before the monitor, and yet
Will ne'er forego the sin, may sink, when age
Palsies the lust and deadens the temptation,
To the priest-ridden, not repentant, dotard,—
For pious hopes hail superstitious terrors,
And seek some sleek Iscariot of the *church*,
To sell salvation for the thirty pieces!

LOUIS (*aside.*)

He speaks as one inspired!

BRAGELONE.

Awake!—awake!
Great though thou art, awake thee from the dream
That earth was made for kings — mankind for slaughter—
Woman for lust—the People for the Palace!
Dark warnings have gone forth; along the air
Lingers the crash of the first Charles's throne!
Behold the young, the fair, the haughty king!
The kneeling courtiers, and the flattering priests;
Lo! where the palace rose, behold the scaffold—

The crowd—the axe—the headsman—and the
Victim!
Lord of the silver lilies, canst thou tell
If the same fate await not thy descendant!
If some meek son of thine imperial line
May make no brother to yon headless spectre!
And when the sage who saddens o'er the end
Tracks back the causes, tremble, lest he find
The seeds, thy wars, thy pomp, and thy profusion
Sowed in a heartless court and breadless people,
Grew to the tree from which men shaped the
scaffold,—
And the long glare of thy funereal glories
Light unborn monarchs to a ghastly grave!
Beware, proud King! the Present cries aloud,
A prophet to the Future! Wake!—beware!

[*Exit Bragelone.*

LOUIS.

Gone! Most ill-omened voice and fearful shape!
Scarce seemed it of the earth; a thing that breathed
But to fulfil some dark and dire behest;
To appal us, and to vanish.—The quick blood
Halts in my veins. Oh! never till this hour
Heard I the voice that awed the soul of Louis,
Or met one brow that did not quail before
My kingly gaze! And this unmitred monk!
I'm glad that none were by.—It was a dream;

So let its memory like a dream depart.
I am no tyrant—nay, I love my people.
My wars were made but for the fame of France!
My pomp! why, tush!—what king can play the hermit?
My conscience smites me not; and but last eve
I did confess, and was absolved!—A bigot;
And half, methinks, a heretic! I wish
The Jesuits had the probing of his doctrines.
Well, well, 'tis o'er!—What ho, there!

Enter Gentleman of the Chamber.

LOUIS.

Wine! Apprise
Once more the Duchess of our presence.—Stay!
Yon monk, what doth he here?

GENTLEMAN.

I know not, Sire,
Nor saw him till this day.

LOUIS.

Strange!—Wine!

[*Exit Gentleman.*

SCENE V.

Duchess de la Vallière—Louis.

LOUIS.

Well, Madam,
We've tarried long your coming, and meanwhile
Have found your proxy in a madman monk,
Whom, for the future, we would pray you spare us.
(*Re-enter Gentleman with wine.*)
So, so! the draught restores us. Fair La Vallière,
Make not yon holy man your confessor;
You'll find small comfort in his lectures.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire,
His meaning is more kindly than his manner.
I pray you, pardon him.

LOUIS.

Ay, ay! No more;
Let's think of him no more. You had, this morn,
A courtlier visitant, methinks—De Lauzun?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yes, Sire.

LOUIS.

A smooth and gallant gentleman.
You're silent. Silence is assent;—'tis well!

MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE (*aside.*)

Down, my full heart! the Duke declares your wish
Is that—that I should bind this broken heart
And—no! I cannot speak—

(*With great and sudden energy.*)

You wish me wed, Sire?

LOUIS.

'Twere best that you should wed; and yet, De Lauzun
Is scarce the happiest choice.—But as thou wilt.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

'Twere best that I should wed!'—thou saidst it, Louis;
Say it once more!

LOUIS.

In honesty, I think so.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

My choice is made, then—I obey the fiat,
And will become a bride!

LOUIS.

The Duke has sped!
I trust he loves thyself, and not thy dower.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

The Duke! what, hast thou read so ill this soul
That thou couldst deem thus meanly of that book
Whose every page was bared to thee? A bitter
Lot has been mine—and this sums up the measure.
Go, Louis! go!—All glorious as thou art—
Earth's Agamemnon—the great king of men—
Thou wert not worthy of this woman's heart!

LOUIS.

Her passion moves me!—Then your choice has fallen
Upon a nobler bridegroom?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Sire, it hath!

LOUIS.

May I demand that choice?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Too soon thou'lt learn it.
Not yet! Ah me!

LOUIS.

Nay, sigh not, my sweet Duchess.
Speak not so sadly. What, though love hath past,
Friendship remains; and still my fondest hope
Is to behold thee happy. Come!—thy hand;
Let us be friends! We are so!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Friends!—No more!
So, it hath come to this! I am contented!
Yes—we are friends!

LOUIS.

And when your choice is made,
You will permit your friend to hail your bridals?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ay, when my choice is made!

LOUIS.

This poor De Lauzun
Hath then no chance? I'm glad of it, and thus
Seal our new bond of friendship on your hand.
Adieu!—and Heaven protect you!

[*Exit Louis.*

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*gazing after him.*)

Heaven hath *heard* thee,
And in this last most cruel, but most gracious,
Proof of thy coldness, breaks the lingering chain
That bound my soul to earth.

(*Enter Bragelone.*)

O holy father!
Brother to him whose grave my guilt prepared,

Witness my firm resolve, support my struggles,
And guide me back to Virtue through Repentance!

BRAGELONE.

Pause, ere thou dost decide.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I've paused too long,
And now, impatient of this weary load,
Sigh for repose.

BRAGELONE.

Oh, Heaven, receive her back!
Through the wide earth, the sorrowing dove hath flown,
And found no haven; weary though her wing
And sullied with the dust of lengthened travail,
Now let her flee away and be at rest!
The peace that man has broken—THOU restore
Whose holiest name is FATHER!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Hear us, Heaven!

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The Gardens at Versailles.

Enter Madame de Montespan, Grammont, and Courtiers.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

So she has fled from court—the saintly Duchess;
A convent's grate must shield this timorous virtue.
Methinks they're not so many to assail it!
Well, trust me, one short moon of fast and penance
Will bring us back the recreant novice——

GRAMMONT.

And
End the eventful comedy by marriage.
Lauzun against the world were even odds;
But Lauzun *with* the world—what saint can stand
it?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*aside.*)

Lauzun!—the traitor! What! to give my rival
The triumph to reject the lawful love
Of him whose lawless passion first betrayed me!

GRAMMONT.

Talk of the devil! Humph—you know the proverb.

Enter Lauzun.

LAUZUN.

Good day, my friends. Your pardon, Madam; I
Thought 'twas the sun that blinded me.—(*Aside.*)
Athenè!
Pray you, a word.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

(*Aloud, and turning away disdainfully.*)
We're not at leisure, Duke.

LAUZUN.

Ha! (*Aside.*) Nay, Athenè, spare your friend these graces.
Forget your state one moment; have you asked
The King the office that you undertook
To make my own? My creditors are urgent.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*aloud.*)

No, my Lord Duke, I have not asked the King!
I grieve to hear your fortunes are so broken,
And that your honoured and august device,
To mend them by your marriage, failed.

GRAMMONT.

She hits him
Hard on the hip. Ha, ha!—the poor De Lauzun!

LAUZUN.

Sir!—Nay, I'm calm!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Pray, may we dare to ask
How long you've loved the Duchess?

LAUZUN.

Ever since
You were her friend and confidante.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

You're bitter.
Perchance you deem your love a thing to boast of.

LAUZUN.

To boast of!—Yes! 'Tis something ev'n to love
The only woman Louis ever *honoured!*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*laying her hand on Lauzun's arm.*)

Insolent! You shall rue this! If I speak
Your name to Louis, coupled with a favour,
The suit shall be your banishment!

[*Exit Madame de Montespan.*

FIRST COURTIER.

Let's follow.
Ha! ha!—Dear Duke, your game, I fear, is lost!
You've played the knave, and thrown away the king.

COURTIERS.

Ha! ha!—Adieu!

[*Exeunt.*

LAUZUN.

Ha! ha!—the devil take you!

SCENE II.

Enter to Lauzun the Marquis de Montespan.

MARQUIS DE MONTESPAN.

My wife's not here! that's well! We're not to speak
But, when we meet, I bow—she smiles politely.
A hundred thousand crowns for being civil
To one another! Well now, that's a thing
That happens but to Marquises. It shews
My value in the state! The King esteems
My comfort of such consequence to France,
He pays me down a hundred thousand crowns
Rather than let my wife disturb my temper!
Lauzun! Aha! he seems as something crossed him.
I will console him. Duke, I'm ravish'd!

LAUZUN.

Damn you!

MONTESPAN.

Damn *me!* What! damn a Marquis! Heaven would think
Twice of it, Sir, before it damn'd a man
Of *my* rank! Damn a Marquis! there's religion!

[*Exit Montespan.*

LAUZUN.

So, she would ruin me! Fore-armed—fore-warned!
I have the King's ear yet, and know some secrets
That could destroy her! Since La Vallière's flight,
Louis grows sad and thoughtful, and looks cold
On her vain rival, who too coarsely shews
The world the stuff court ladies' hearts are made of.
She will undo herself—and I will help her.
Weave on thy web, false Montespan, weave on;
The bigger spider shall devour the smaller.
The war's declared—'tis clear that one must fall:—
I'll be polite—the *Lady* to the wall!

[*Exit Lauzun.*

SCENE III.

Sunset—the old Chateau of La Vallière—the Convent of the Carmelites at a distance—the same scene as that with which the play opens.

Enter the Duchess de La Vallière and Bragelone from the Chateau.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Once more, ere yet I take farewell of earth,
I see mine old, familiar, maiden home!
All how unchanged!—the same the hour, the scene,

The very season of the year!—the stillness
Of the smooth wave—the stillness of the trees,
Where the winds sleep like dreams!—and, oh! the calm
Of the blue heavens around yon holy spires,
Pointing, like gospel truths, through calm and storm,
To man's great home!

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

Oh! how the years recede!
Upon this spot I spoke to her of love,
And dreamt of bliss for earth!

(*The vesper-bell tolls.*)

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Hark! the deep sound,
That seems a voice from some invisible spirit,
Claiming the world for God.—When last I heard it
Hallow this air, here stood my mother, living;
And I—was then a mother's *pride!*—and yonder
Came thy brave brother in his glittering mail;
And—ah! these thoughts are bitter!—were he living
How would he scorn them!

BRAGELONE (*who has been greatly agitated.*)

No!—ah, no!—thou wrong'st him!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yet, were he living, could I but receive
From his own lips my pardon, and his blessing,
My soul would deem one dark memorial rased
Out of the page most blistered with its tears!

BRAGELONE.

Then have thy wish! and in these wrecks of man
Worn to decay, and rent by many a storm,
Survey the worm the world called Bragelone.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Avaunt!—avaunt!—I dream!—the dead returned
To earth to mock me!—No! this hand is warm!
I have one murther less upon my soul.
I thank thee, Heaven!—(*swoons.*)

BRAGELONE (*supporting her.*)

The blow strikes home; and yet
What is my life to her? Louise!—She moves not;
She does not breathe; how still she sleeps!—I saw her
Sleep in her mother's arms, and then, in sleep
She smiled. *There's no smile now!*—poor child!
One kiss!
It is a brother's kiss—it has no guilt;

Kind Heaven, it has no guilt.—I have survived
All earthlier thoughts: her crime, my vows, effaced them.
A brother's kiss!—Away! I'm human still;
I thought I had been stronger; God forgive me!
Awake, Louise!—awake! She breathes once more;
The spell is broke; the marble warms to life!
And I—freeze back to stone!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I heard a voice
That cried 'Louise!'—Speak, speak!—my sense is dim,
And struggles darkly with a blessed ray
That shot from heaven.—My shame hath not destroy'd thee!

BRAGELONE.

No!—life might yet serve *thee!*—and I lived on
Dead to all else. I took the vows, and then,
Ere yet I laid me down, and bade the Past
Fade like a ghost before the dawn of heaven,
One sacred task was left.—If love was dust,
Love, like ourselves, hath an immortal soul,
That doth survive whate'er it takes from clay;
And that—the holier part of love—became
A thing to watch thy steps—a guardian spirit

To hover round, disguised, unknown, undream'd of,
To soothe the sorrow, to redeem the sin,
And lead thy soul to peace!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

O bright revenge!
Love strong as death, and nobler far than woman's!

BRAGELONE.

To *peace*—ah, let me deem so!—the mute cloister,
The spoken ritual, and the solemn veil,
Are nought themselves;—the Huguenot abjures
The monkish cell, but breathes, perchance, the prayer
That speeds as quick to the Eternal Throne!
In our own souls must be the solitude;
In our own thoughts the sanctity!—'Tis *then*
The feeling that our vows have built the wall
Passion can storm not, nor temptation sap,
Gives calm its charter, roots out wild regret,
And makes the heart the world-disdaining cloister.
This—this is peace! but pause, if in thy breast
Linger the wish of earth. Alas! all oaths
Are vain, if nature shudders to record them—
The subtle spirit 'scapes the sealed vessel!
The false devotion is the true despair!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Fear not!—I feel 'tis not the walls of stone,
Told beads, nor murmured hymns, that bind the heart,
Or exorcise the world; the spell's the thought
That where most weak we've banished the temptation,
And reconciled, what earth would still divide,
The human memories and the immortal conscience.

BRAGELONE.

Doubt fades before thine accents. On the day
That gives thee to the veil we'll meet once more.
Let mine be man's last blessing in this world.
Oh! tell me, then, thou'rt happier than thou hast been;
And when we part, I'll seek some hermit cell
Beside the walls that compass thee, and prayer,
Morning and night, shall join our souls in heaven.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yes, generous spirit! think not that my future
Shall be repining as the past. Thou livest,
And conscience smiles again. The shattered bark
Glides to its haven. Joy! the land is near.

[*Exit Duchess de la Vallière into the Chateau.*

BRAGELONE.

So, it is past!—the secret is disclosed!
The hand she did reject on earth has led her
To holier ties. I have not lived in vain!
Yet who had dreamed, when through the ranks of war
Went the loud shout of "France and Bragelone!"
That the monk's cowl would close on all my laurels?
A never-heard philosopher is Life!—
Our happiest hours are sleep's;—and sleep proclaims,
Did we but listen to its warning voice,
That REST is earth's elixir. Why, then, pine
That, ere our years grow feverish with their toil,
Too weary-worn to find the rest they sigh for,
We learn betimes THE MORAL OF REPOSE?
I will lie down, and sleep away this world.
The pause of care, the slumber of tired passion,
Why, why defer till night is well nigh spent?
When the brief sun that gilt the landscape sets,
When o'er the music on the leaves of life
Chill silence falls, and every fluttering hope
That voiced the world with song has gone to roost,
Then let thy soul, from the poor labourer, learn
'Sleep's sweetest taken soonest!'

(*As he moves away, his eye falls upon a glove dropped by the Duchess de la Vallière—he takes it up.*)

And this hath touched her hand!—it were a comfort
To hoard a single relic!

(*Kisses the glove, and then suddenly dropping it*)

No!—'tis sinful!

[*Exit Bragelone.*

SCENE IV.

The exterior of the Gothic Convent of the Carmelites—The windows illumined—Music heard from within—A crowd without—Enter Courtiers, Ladies, Priests, &c., and pass through the door of the Chapel, in the centre of the building.

Enter Lauzun from a door in the side wing of the Convent—To him, Grammont.

LAUZUN.

Where hast thou left the king?

GRAMMONT.

Not one league hence

LAUZUN.

Ere the clock strikes, La Vallière takes the veil.

GRAMMONT.

Great Heaven! so soon!—and Louis sent me on,
To learn how thou hadst prospered with the Duchess.
He is so sanguine—this imperious King,
Who never heard a "No" from living lips!
How did she take his letter?

LAUZUN.

In sad silence;
Then mused a little while, and some few tears
Stole down her cheeks, as, with a trembling hand,
She gave me back the scroll.

GRAMMONT.

You mean her answer.

LAUZUN.

No; the King's letter. "Tell him that I thank
him;"
(Such were her words;) "but that my choice is
made;
And ev'n this last assurance of his love
I dare not keep: 'tis only when I pray,
That I may think of him. This is my answer."

GRAMMONT.

No more?—no written word?

LAUZUN.

None, Grammont. Then
She rose and left me; and I heard the bell
Calling the world to see a woman scorn it.

GRAMMONT.

The King will never brook it. He will grasp her
Back from this yawning tomb of living souls.
The news came on him with such sudden shock;
The long noviciate thus abridged; and she—
Ever so waxen to his wayward will!—
She cannot yet be marble.

LAUZUN.

Wronged affection
Makes many a Niobe from tears. Haste, Grammont,
Back to the King, and bid him fly to save,
Or nerve his heart to lose, her. I will follow,—
My *second* charge fulfilled.

GRAMMONT.

And what is that?

LAUZUN.

Revenge and justice!—Go!

[*Exit Grammont.*

LAUZUN (*looking down the stage*)

I hear her laugh—
I catch the glitter of her festive robe!
Athenè comes to triumph—and to tremble!

SCENE V.

Madame de Montespan, Courtiers, and Lauzun.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN (*aside.*)

Now for the crowning cup of sparkling fortune!
A rarer pearl than Egypt's queen dissolved
I have immersed in that delicious draught,
A woman's triumph o'er a fairer rival!

(*As she turns to enter the convent, she perceives Lauzun.*)

What! you here, Duke?

LAUZUN.

Ay, Madam; I've not ye
To thank you for—my banishment!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

The Ides
Of March are come—not over!

LAUZUN.

Are they not?
For some they may be! You are here to witness—

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

My triumph!

LAUZUN.

And to take a *friend's* condolence.
I bear this letter from the King!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

The King!

(*Reads the letter.*)

"We do not blame you; blame belongs to love,
And love had nought with you."—What! what! I tremble!
"The Duke de Lauzun, of these lines the bearer,
Confirms their purport: from our royal court
We do excuse your presence." Banished, Duke?
Is that the word?—What, banished!

LAUZUN.

Hush!—you mar
The holy silence of the place. 'Tis true;
You read aright. Our gracious King permits you
To quit Versailles. Versailles is not the world.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Perdition!—banished!

LAUZUN.

You can take the veil.
Meanwhile, enjoy *your triumph!*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Triumph!—Ah!
She triumphs o'er me to the last. My soul
Finds hell on earth—and hers makes earth a heaven!

LAUZUN.

Hist!—will you walk within?

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

O, hateful world!
What!—hath it come to this?

LAUZUN.

You spoil your triumph!

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

Lauzun, I thank thee!—thank thee—thank—and curse thee!

[*Exit Madame de Montespan.*

LAUZUN (*looking after her with a subdued laugh.*)

Ha, ha!—the *broken* heart can know no pang
Like that which racks the *bad* heart when its sting
Poisons itself. Now, then, away to Louis.
The bell still tolls: there's time. This soft La Vallière!
The only thing that ever baffled Lauzun,
And felt not his revenge!—revenge, poor soul!
Revenge upon a dove!—she shall be saved
From the pale mummies of yon Memphian vault,
Or the great Louis will be less than man,—
Or that fond sinner will be more than woman.

[*Exit Lauzun.*

SCENE VI.

The interior of the Chapel of the Carmelite Convent—On the foreground, Courtiers, Ladies, &c.—At the back of the stage, the altar, only partially seen through the surrounding throng — The Officials pass to and fro, swinging the censers—The stage darkened—Lights suspended along the aisle, and tapers by the altar.

(*As the Scene opens, solemn music, to which is chaunted the following*—)

HYMN.

Come from the world, O weary soul,
For run the race and near the goal!
Flee from the net, O lonely dove,
Thy nest is built the clouds above!
Turn, wild and worn with panting fear,
And slake thy thirst, thou wounded deer,
In Jordan's holy springs!
Arise! O fearful soul, arise!
For broke the chain and calm the skies!
As moths fly upward to the star,
The light allures thee from afar.
Though earth is lost, and space is wide,
The smile of God shall be thy guide,
And Faith and Hope thy wings!

(*As the Hymn ends, Bragelone enters, and stands apart in the background.*)

FIRST COURTIER.

Three minutes more, and earth has lost La Vallière !

SECOND COURTIER.

So young !—so fair !

THIRD COURTIER.

'Twas whispered, that the King
Would save her yet !

FIRST COURTIER.

What ! snatch her from the altar ?
He durst not, man !

Enter Louis, Grammont, and Lauzun.

LOUIS.

Hold ! we forbid the rites !

(*As the King advances hastily up the aisle, Bragelone places himself before him.*)

Back, monk ! revere the presence of the King !

BRAGELONE.

And thou the palace of the King of kings !

LOUIS.

Dotard ! we claim our subject.

BRAGELONE.

She hath past
The limit of your realm. Ye priests of God,
Complete your solemn task!—The church's curse
Hangs on the air. Descendant of Saint Louis,
Move—and the avalanche falls!

(*The Duchess de la Vallière, still drest in the bridal and gorgeous attire assumed before the taking of the veil, descends from the altar.*)

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

No, holy friend!
I need it not; my soul is my protector.
Nay, thou mayst trust me.

BRAGELONE (*after a pause.*)

Thou art right.—I trust thee?

LOUIS.

(*Leading the Duchess de la Vallière to the front of the stage.*)

Thou hast not ta'en the veil?—Ev'n Time had mercy.
Thou art saved!—thou art saved!—to love—to life!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Ah, Sire!

LOUIS.

Call me not Sire!—forget that dreary time
When thou wert Duchess, and myself the King.
Fly back, fly back, to those delicious hours
When *I* was but thy lover and thy Louis!
And thou my dream—my bird—my fairy flower—
My violet, shrinking in the modest shade
Until transplanted to this breast—to haunt
The common air with odours! Oh, Louise!
Hear me!—the fickle lust of change allured me,
The pride thy virtues wounded armed against thee,
Until I dreamed I loved thyself no longer;
But now this dread resolve, this awe of parting,
Re-binds me to thee—bares my soul before me—
Dispels the lying mists that veiled thine image,
And tells me that I never loved but thee!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I am not then despised!—thou lov'st me still!
And when I pray for thee, my heart may feel
That it hath nothing to forgive!

LOUIS.

Louise!
Thou dost renounce this gloomy purpose?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Never!
It is not gloomy!—think'st thou it is gloom
To feel that, as my soul becomes more pure,
Heaven will more kindly listen to the prayers
That rise for *thee*?—is that thought *gloom*, my
Louis?

LOUIS.

Oh! slay me not with tenderness! Return!
And if thy conscience startle at my love,
Be still my friend—my angel!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I am weak,
But, in the knowledge of my weakness, strong!
I could not breathe the air that's sweet with thee,
Nor cease to love!—in flight my only safety;
And were that flight not made by solemn vows
Eternal, it were bootless; for the wings
Of my wild soul know but two bournes to speed to—
Louis and Heaven! And, oh! in Heaven at last
My soul, unsinning, may unite with Louis!

LOUIS.

I do implore thee!—

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

No; thou canst not tempt me!
My *heart* already is the nun..

LOUIS.

Thou know'st not
I have dismissed thy rival from the court.
Return!—though mine no more, at least thy Louis
Shall know no second love!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

What! wilt thou, Louis,
Renounce for me eternally my rival,
And live alone for——

LOUIS.

Thee! Louise, I swear it!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*raising her arms to Heaven.*)

Father! at length, I dare to hope for pardon,
For now remorse may prove itself sincere!
Bear witness, Heaven! I never loved this man
So well as now! and never seemed *his* love
Built on so sure a rock! Upon thine altar
I lay the offering. I revoke the past;

For Louis, Heaven was left—and now I leave
Louis, when tenfold more beloved, for Heaven!
Ah! pray with me! Be this our latest token—
This memory of sweet moments—sweet, though sinless!
Ah! pray with me! that I may hive till death
The thought—'we prayed together for forgiveness!'

LOUIS.

Oh! wherefore never knew I till this hour
The treasure I shall lose! I dare not call thee
Back from the Heaven where thou art half already!
Thy soul demands celestial destinies,
And stoops no more to earth. Be thine the peace,
And mine the penance! Yet these awful walls,
The rigid laws of this severest order,
Yon spectral shapes, this human sepulchre,—
And thou, the soft, the delicate, the highborn,
The adored delight of Europe's mightiest king,—
Thou canst not bear it!

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

I have borne much worse—
Thy change and thy desertion!—Let it pass!
There is no terror in the things without;
Our souls alone the palace or the prison;
And the one thought, that I have fled from sin

Will fill the cell with images more glorious,
And haunt its silence with a mightier music,
Than ever thronged illumined halls, or broke
From harps by mortal strung!

LOUIS.

I will not hear thee!
I cannot brave these thoughts. Thy angel voice
But tells me what a sun of heavenly beauty
Glides from the earth, and leaves my soul to darkness.
This is *my* work!—'twas I for whom that soul
Forsook its native element; for me,
Sorrow consumed thy youth, and conscience gnawed
That patient, tender, unreproachful heart.
And now this crowns the whole! the priest—the altar—
The sacrifice—the victim! Touch me not!
Speak not! I am unmann'd enough already.
I—I—I choke! These tears—let them speak for me.
Now! now thy hand—O, God! farewell, for ever!

[*Exit Louis.*

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

For ever! till the angel's trump shall wake
fection from the grave. Ah! blessed thought.
r ever! that's no word for earth; but angels

Shall cry 'for ever' when we meet again:
Be firm, my heart, be firm!

(*After a pause, turning to Bragelone, with a slight smile.*)

'Tis past! we've conquered!

(*The Duchess de la Vallière re-ascends to the altar—the crowd close around.*)

Music.

CHORUS.

Hark! to the nuptial train are opened wide
The Eternal Gates. Hosanna to the bride!

GRAMMONT.

She has ta'en the veil—the last dread rite is done.

ABBESS (*from the altar.*)

Sister Louise! before the eternal grate
Becomes thy barrier from the living world,
It is allowed thee once more to behold
The face of men, and bid farewell to friendship.

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

Why do I shudder? why shrinks back my being
From our last gaze, like Nature from the Grave?
One moment, and one look, and o'er her image

Thick darkness falls, till Death, that morning star,
Heralds immortal day. I hear her steps
Treading the mournful silence; o'er my soul
Pauses the freezing time. O Lord, support me!
One effort more—one effort!—Wake, my soul!
'Tis thy last trial; wilt thou play the craven?

(*The crowd give way, the Duchess de la Vallière, in the habit of the Carmelite nuns, passes down the steps of the altar, led by the Abbess—As she pauses to address those whom she recognises in the crowd, the chorus chaunts*)—

Sister, look and speak thy last,
From the world thou'rt dying fast;
While farewell to life thou'rt giving,
Dead already to the living.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*coming to the front of the stage, sees Lauzun.*)

Lauzun! thou serv'st a King, whate'er his faults,
Who merits all thy homage: honour—love him.
His glory needs no friendship; but in sickness,
Or sorrow, *kings* need love. Be faithful, Lauzun!
And, far from thy loud world, one lowly voice
Shall not forget thee.

BRAGELONE (*aside.*)

All the strife is hushed!

My heart's wild sea lies mute, and o'er the waves
The Saviour walks.

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE (*approaching Bragelone, and kneeling to him.*)

And now, oh! friend and father,
Bless the poor Nun!

BRAGELONE.

As Duchess of La Vallière
Thou wert not happy; as the Carmelite Sister,
Say—*art* thou happy?

DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

Yes!

BRAGELONE (*laying his hand on her head.*)

O Father, bless her!

CHORUS.

Hark! in heaven is mirth!
Jubilate!
Grief leaves guilt on earth!
Jubilate!
Joy for sin forgiven!
Jubilate!
Come, O Bride of Heaven!
Jubilate!

Curtain falls slowly.

END.

EPILOGUE,

TO BE

SPOKEN IN THE CHARACTER

OF

THE MARQUIS DE MONTESPAN.

Damn *me!*—What, damn a Marquis! there's a phrase
That's only fit for peasants, or for plays!
A Marquis damn'd!—the gods will never do it
While authors live;—I hear they're brought up to it.
But folks still talk of what runs in their head!—
Methinks, I see some persons better bred:—
Ah! if your hearts one kindly impulse touches,
You will not damn the Marquis—nor the Duchess!
Far from so harsh a fate, you all must know,
Though born about two hundred years ago,
Though, at the court of Louis, called 'The Great,'
My pension proves how well I served the state;
Yet *I* alone, of all my age, survive,
My Portia's gone—still Brutus is alive!
Strange changes, gentlemen, methinks have been
Since Pomp and Louis walk'd the living scene.
When I was young, were Dukes inclined to roam,—
Six horses bore them half a mile from home;
But now a Duke takes journeys to the moon,
And steps his half a mile from a balloon!
Once, from the state when honest folks could squeeze,
Like me, a competence, they lived at ease!
But now, all men, no matter what their stations,
Run after things called—'tempting speculations!'

Tell me, my friends, (it puzzles *my* invention,)
How, with most profit, to invest MY PENSION!
I like not land—one never gets one's rent;
Stocks?—who the deuce can live on two per cent.?
But, Heaven be thanked, there are, to cheer one's vapours,
Some famous speculations—in the papers!
(*Takes out a newspaper.*)
First of the many modes the wind to raise,
"Forty per cent.—new nine-wheeled *Cabriolets!*"
"Railway to Gretna Green, ten miles a minute,
Five pounds-a-share-deposit!"—Catch me in it!
"Grand Caoutchouc Co.!" (Ah, hard words catch the lubber,)
For making gateposts out of Indian rubber.
New banks that pay you three per cent.!—I see—
They grab your hundred, and return you three!
All are called Companies—all call for cash,
And all make bubbles, if they make a splash.
Nay, when you've gone the round of all the rest,
You've still, I find, your body to invest;
And a new company your bones will bury
In that gay spec—THE LONDON CEMETERY!
Well, well! let other flies be caught by honey,
These gully-plots shall never catch my money;—
Brisk though the wind, I'll just heave out the anchor,
And, gad, I'll keep my pension with my banker.
How I run on!—excuse this idle chatter,
But pensions, now, are such a ticklish matter!
You seem delightful persons, I declare;
Pray come again—don't drive us to *despair!*
What though the convent has our Duchess captured,
Forgive her faults—and she'll be charmed, enraptured!

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